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LANGUAGE PLAY AND LEXICAL INNOVATION OF THE 21st CENTURY ENGLISH

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Abstract

In traditional linguistics the causes of lexical innovations are thought to be of extralinguistic and linguistic nature, in other words, historical, social, psychological, etc causes vs linguistic analogy, economy of language resources, ellipsis, differentiation of synonyms, etc. However, it is not uncommon to assume that new words replenishing the vocabulary of the language also emerge because of jocular deliberate play with potential word meanings or word morphemes, this tendency growing more and more apparent in present-day English. The paper aims to explore the role of the ludic component in enriching the vocabulary of modern English by examining the nature, patterns and outcomes of language play observed in the corpus of lexical innovations. The Corpus was compiled from online English dictionaries and popular Internet new word websites (crowdsourced Open Dictionary, Macmillan dictionary Buzz Words, Wiktionary, Wordspy and new word blogs at Cambridge, Oxford, Collins online dictionary websites), which more and more often include new terms coming from computer-aided communication of social networks regarded as an open creative domain constantly generating new linguistic forms and word usages. The inventory of lexical innovations on the new vocabulary resource sites include neologisms, nonce-words, buzzwords and other forms of linguistic experimentation with word forms and/or meanings, which are viewed as potential additions to the vocabulary of the English language.

Keywords: Language play, lexical innovation, neologisms**,** word play.

1. Introduction

Language play is drawing attention as an effective tool of coining new words in the English language. This could be attributed to the expansion of discourse boundaries where new word meanings and new word forms are generated and activated. Today, discourse practices, where language play is employed, entail everyday informal, both habitual and professional, communication, media doublespeak messages, humorous and satirical fiction, radio and TV talk shows, advertising messages. To a great extent, language play gains popularity in mobile and Internet communication, including social networking which is regarded as an open creative domain constantly generating new linguistic forms and word usages. Lavrova (2010) suggests that the growing interest in language play on the part of the addresser as well as the addressee is twofold: firstly, it is due to the possibility of deviating from the language norm; secondly, it is linked to creative capacity of the language user.

In traditional linguistics the causes of lexical innovations may be of two kinds: extralinguistic (historical, social, psychological, etc.) and linguistic (analogy, economy of language resources, ellipsis, differentiation of synonyms, etc.) However, it is not uncommon to assume that new words replenishing the vocabulary of the language also emerge because of jocular deliberate play with potential word meanings or word morphemes, this tendency growing more and more apparent in present-day English.

1.1. Language play in Scholarship

Traditionally, the term 'language play' is used in scholarship in a broad and narrow sense. The broad interpretation belongs to Wittgenstein (1985) who is said to be the first to introduce the term into scholarly discourse. He regarded language play as the system of conventional rules that the language user resorts to in describing the language (Wittgenstein, 1985). Play is inherent in culture, the essence of the human world. One of the most significant (human and cultural) aspects of play is that it is fun. Huizinga identifies its absolute freedom, order, lack of material interest on the part of the player (Huizinga, 2016).

1.2. Language play and Linguistics

In a narrow sense the term language play is frequently employed by linguists as "realization of the poetic function (aesthetic function)" (Zemskaya, Kitaygorodskaya, & Rosanova, 1983, p. 172), as "any deliberate unconventional use of the language, or one of the forms of experimenting with language" (Sannikov, 2016, p. 41), as "…intonational, rhythmic, phonetic, lexical, morphological, etc. modifications of language norms which use the same principle, of deviating from language norms" (Crystal, 1998, p. 22). More specifically, language play could be reduced to play on words, or wordplay "A play on words can come into existence (a) through the change in meaning, and therefore from homonymy and polysemy, (b) through the change of word forms and the rearranging of sound, e.g. an anagram, the rearranging of syllables or of morphemes, (c) by blend" (Bussmann, 1998, p. 910).

The functions of using language play may be manifold, including emotive, nominative, communicative, manipulative, phatic, aesthetic or expressive ones. But as Crystal (1998) observes, people play with language when they manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for themselves or for the benefit of others. He means 'manipulate' literally: we take some linguistic feature – such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters – and make it do things it does

not normally do. We are, in effect, bending and breaking the rules of the language. And if someone were to ask why we do it, the answer is simply 'for fun' (Crystal, 1998). Therefore, the ludic function (showing off one's wit) seems worthwhile mentioning in the framework of this investigation.

1.3. Lexical innovations: the neologist's view

For the purposes of this study it is important that we summarize the conception of new word in neology.

According to Algeo (1991) "a new word is a form or the use of a form not recorded in general dictionaries" (p. 2). The form may be one that is usually spelled as a single word (*guesstimate) or* a compound *(sandwich generation)* or even an idiomatic phrase *(out of the loop)*. Theoretically, a neologism is any word, meaning, or expression that is considered to be an addition to the language at a particular time (Barnhart, 1985). The main property of new words and meanings is their relative unfamiliarity in the general vocabulary or even in a specialized vocabulary, such as slang, technical jargon, or non-standard or "uneducated" use. This idea echoes the postulates of neology in Russia: "Neologisms" are closely related to the concept of 'time', which is fixed in the minds of the speakers (Zabotkina, 1989). Therefore, new words are those ones, which appear in the language later than the period of time determined as a starting point of neological research. These timeframes are arbitrary and different scholars choose different periods in the life of the speaking community; some scholars are inclined to consider World War II as a boundary line between 'old' and 'new', others think that space exploration which manifests the explosion of technological advancements is that borderline (See, for example, J. Algeo's *Fifty Years Among New Words: A Dictionary of New Words since 1945-1991 and The Barnhart Dictionary of New Words since 1963*); still others consider the advent of the Internet as the launching pad for the influx of linguistic innovations embracing all levels of the language structure, let alone lexis. In short, the criterion of neologism is arbitrary, yet discernible (Zabotkina, 1989).

Changes in the vocabulary of any language are likely to take place when the relationship between the name (the signifier) and the thing named (the signified) is changed. There are 4 possible variations in this relationship: 1) the current form is used to denote a new referent (thing, object, event, idea, concept); 2) a new name is used to denote the referent which already has the name in the language; 3) a new name is given to a new referent; 4) the name ceases to be used because the referent lost its significance (e.g. ceased to exist). In other words 'neologism is a new word (or word phrase), which is new in form or in content, or both. Zabotkina (2012) argues that a new word is coined and/or a new word meaning develops for three rhetorical reasons: the necessity to name a thing, the necessity for emphasis, the necessity for beauty. We can assume that new word coiners are motivated by the need to name some common things in an unusual way, thus testing the limits of the language structure, and by doing so, to have fun, amusement.

New information technologies triggered new ways of communicating among people. More and more often the English vocabulary is replenished with the so-called communicative lexical items which lay beyond the scope of neological studies. With the advent of social media the new word resources on the Internet register a great number of abbreviations, acronyms, graphical modifications and other ways of experimenting with the language. The lexical items of our corpus were taken from the Internet new

word resource bank on the ground of meeting predominantly the last two needs, i.e. the need 'to realize one's linguistic-creative abilities, to demonstrate one's idiostyle'.

2. Problem Statement

Kuranova (2010) discusses two primary aspects of language play: first, aestheticism which is understood as the process targeted at deriving amusement rather than obtaining the result; second, conventionalism (the players are aware of the rules and observe them). Yet, the rules of ludic language are different from those which govern other uses of language (Crystal, 1998).

Gridina (2008) suggests that language play: 1) generates other than conventional forms, or meanings that are attributed to the existing ones; 2) manifests itself in unconventional usage of language or a combination of various language means; 3) is associated with conscious production of 'defective', abnormal usage of language; 4) appeals to linguistic competence of the addressee.

The latter factor is emphasized by many scholars (Gridina, 2008; Nukhov, 1997; Lavrova, 2010; Pavlova, 2018). It is essential that both the addresser and the addressee possess communicative equality, the former relying on the linguistic competence of the latter, on his or her appreciation of the creative twists of wit and manipulation with the language. […]. "Language play implies a new linguistic competence, a certain level of linguocultural literacy and mastery of language use" (Tsoneva 2000, p. 199), the skill of using the language creatively and unconventionally in order to achieve a desired aesthetic or pragmatic effect.

Among various conceptions of language play discussed and debated in literature, the psycholinguistic and linguosemiotic perspectives are worth mentioning here. The psycholinguistic approach views language play as a variation of play per se; it is a specific type of language competence which is linked to creative thinking (Zemskaya et al., 1983). Gridina (2008) points to 3 characteristics of linguocreative thinking: 1) using associative ties or proximities in manipulating with language items, being able to produce the language novelty based on the existing components of the language system and extralinguistic experience; 2) disengaging the potential of the language structure (system?) by building and altering the word forms and meanings via analogy and asymmetric properties of the linguistic sign; 3) tending to bend and break the language norm both in personal and institutional discourse (Gridina, 2008). In linguosemiotic studies language play is recognized as a special linguistic code opposed to the linguistic standard used in the speech community; it aims to delineate the boundaries of the norm and anti-norm and thus showing the tendencies in the development of the language system (Zemskaya et al., 1983).

3. Research Questions

In this article we consider language play as a linguistic tool for enriching the English vocabulary for the purpose of meeting nominating challenges as well as communicative or emotive needs of language users. Therefore, we view the lexical items of our corpus with reference to the ways of deviating from its phonetic and graphical form, of manipulating with morphological structure and derivational patterns of word formation as well as of violating the collocability of lexical items etc. For this purpose, we introduce

the concept of ludic technique (ludic component (Konovalova, 2008), or ludeme (Ryzhkov, 2009) as a unit of analysis and taxonomy of language play techniques.

The research questions posed in this study are the following:

a) What are the mechanisms and models of language play instrumental in coining lexical novelties?

b) In which types of discourse (personal or institutional/socialized) new word forms and meanings or both are generated?

4.   Purpose of the Study

We confine ourselves to exploring the role of language play in enriching the vocabulary of the 21st English. The aim of this article is to examine the patterns and inventory of language play as one of the pragmatic factors accountable for generating new words and meanings in modern English. The corpus of lexical innovations was compiled from online English dictionaries and popular Internet new word websites (crowdsourced Open Dictionary, Buzz Words, Wiktionary, Wordspy and new word blogs at Cambridge, Oxford, Collins online dictionary websites (Oxford dictionary blog, n.d.; Word Spy: The World Love's Guide to New Words, n.d.). The inventory of lexical innovations on the new vocabulary resource sites include neologisms, nonce-words, buzzwords and other forms of linguistic experimentation with lexical items, which are regarded as potential additions to the vocabulary of the English language. The corpus data comprises 250 lexical items.

5.   Research Methods

The idea of this study was inspired by Zemskaya et al. (1983) who argue that ludic techniques could be observed in either the expression plane, i.e sound or graphical form, or in the content plane, i.e. the meaning of the linguistic unit, or in both simultaneously. As Krassa and Volkogonova (2012) suggest the so-called linguocreative patterns of language play defined as "structural and semantic patterns of coining words or generating word meanings in context which aim to achieve a desired ludic effect (ironic, humorous, playful)" (p. 75). The patterns are observed on graphical, phonetic, morphological and lexical, word-building (derivational) and stylistic levels and seem instrumental in exploring the corpus of lexical innovations under consideration. In order to meet these research tasks the following research procedures were used: morphemic analysis, derivational and componential analysis, contextual analysis based on the dictionary definitions and complemented by quantitative procedures.

6. Findings

Table 01. Examples of language play manifestations at different levels of the language structure

Graphical Level (4%)	Phonetic Level (7%)	Lexical –Semantic an Morphological Level (29%)	Grammatical (Word Building) Level (50%)	Stylistic Level (10%)
Graphical Mimicry e.g. attachmeant, etc.	*Alliteration* e.g. crunch creep, grab-and-goer , switch and swipe generation, she shed	*Semantic Analogy* Coffee Party (vs Tea Party) Mojito Curtain (vs Iron Curtain), , word-of-post	*Affixation* lookup*able*, sing*able*, single*dom*, partner between*ess*	*Oxymoron* humblebrag, protologism
cacography mylk, the ladeez, knartsy, sarchasm, lulz, tole-rant	*Rhythm and Rhyming* e.g. lipstick on a pig, sheds with beds, dude food	*Paradigmatic analogy* blog*vine* (vs grapevine), verbi*vore*, femi*nazi,* exercise *widow,* food*oir,* Corby*nista*	*Blending* nevertiree, imagineer neverendum, wellderly quintastic, phantonym, bromance, Britalian, infobesity, Brexodus etc	*Hyperbole* Frankenstorm, flunami, carmageddon
		Borrowing al desco (cf al fresco)	*Composition* ghit, vool, noogler, chext, edress, mom-in-chief	*Paronamasia (Pun)* hus-been, sofalizing, askhole, hairography, textual harassment, booktique, social notworking, putpocket, pseudocide copyleft
			Acronyms OH (other half), HEN (happy empty nester), HENRY, IWAG, TWAG, WEIRD, Endies, Sindies, FBUI (Facebooking under influence) , QUACKing (Quirky Unusual Acts of Christmas Kindness)	*Allusion* cyber Cyrano
			Shortening indyref, terp, ridic, obvs, awks	*Understatement* nanobreak
			Conversion (functional shift) ped-text (v), live-tweet (v), tweet-up (n), brexit (v)	

The above illustrations enable us to agree with Kumanitsina (2006) who claims that ludic techniques are essentially based on the associations of the word (its inner form), which predict the

decoding on the part of the recipient and may be grouped according to the principles of associative coordination and associative contrast such as integration, juxtaposition, identification, imitation, derivation, provocation. The associative capacity of the word consists in its multiple associative ties (phonetic, graphical, lexical, derivational, syntactic etc.).

Let's consider the case of **bewonderment** – *a feeling of being overwhelmed by wonder* included into crowdsourced Open Dictionary [www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/bewonderment] which could illustrate the interplay with linguistic components to coin a new word. Its prototype word, **bewilderment** – from **bewilder** (v) – 1680 *confuse as to direction or situation*, *also figuratively, purplex, puzzle, confuse*, from **be- -"**thoroughly**"** + archaic **– wilder –** lead astray, lure into the wilds, which probably is the back-formation of **wilderness**v[www.etymonline.com/word/bewilder]. The morpheme '**wilder'** is replaced with the morpheme '**wonder**" – from OE 'wundor' 'marvellous thing, miracle, object of astonishment , which reveals a slight difference in graphical and sound form. Based on the proximity of sound and graphical form, yet difference in meaning between the substituted and the original morphemes, the coiner seems to play with the form and meaning of two words (specifically, two morphemes) to generate a new word with a contrasting meaning denoting a feeling; cf. **bewilderment** (conventional) - *a feeling of being extremely confused* vs **bewonderment** (new)*– a feeling of being overwhelmed by wonder*).

Let's take a closer look at the patterns of language play at different levels (tiers) of the language structure (see Table 1).

6.1. Graphical level

Illustrations of language play at graphical and phonetic levels are not numerous (4% of the corpus data), yet these patterns embrace graphical and/or sound modifications of the word, which are easily observable. Interestingly, word form deviations are expected to be recognizable by the recipient because the rules of language play demand that the addressee/recipient should be able to decode the word and share the fun with the coiner of the jocular name. Modifications in spelling (presumably, intentional) suggest additional (jocular, sarcastic, humorous) senses in the semantic structure of the prototype word.

e.g. *sarchasm* - the intellectual gap between the person who makes a sarcastic joke and those who don't get it;

knarsty - extremely scary, dangerous, and filthy (i.e. knarsty is something that is so nasty it needs its own word)

economicky – (humorous) relating to economics, especially in a way that is difficult to understand.

In the following example, the jocular effect of language play is based on homonymy of morphemes - ment (noun suffix) and meant (past form of the verb to mean)

attachmeant - the file you meant to attach to your email but did not.

6.2. Phonetic level

On this level the coiners of new words play with sounds (alliteration) and rhymes to render the desired pragmatic effect.

e.g. *grab-and-goer* **-** n. a person who dislikes shopping, or does not have much time for shopping, and so   tends to select items quickly and without much thought

she shed - a private room where a woman *can relax, be alone and do* whatever *she pleases*

Lipstick on a pig **-** an unsuccessful attempt to make something ugly look more attractive

yummy mummy - an attractive and fashionably dressed young mother < yummy – young mobile male+ y(ie) and mummy).

6.3. Morphological patterns

These patterns involve modifications of word grammatical categories on the basis of the so-called paradigmatic analogy, which may result in producing new word building morphemes (Guralnik, 2006). We identified several combining forms involved in coining new words

- *nazi* (forming blended nouns denoting people seen as dictatorial and controlling) *e.g.feminazi, grammar nazi, environazi;*

- *ista* (forming nouns denoting one who follows a principle; an adept); *e.g.fashionista, recessionista, Corbynista, Trumpista* (words formed using this suffix usually have more of a pejorative connotation than related words formed using -ist);

- *porn*   e.g. *mommy porn n.* (a literary genre that includes elements that allegedly appeal to mothers and housewives), *property porn* (informal) a genre of television programme *or* glossy magazine article *showing* desirable properties *with* luxurious interiors *and* idyllic locations.

- *(n)oir*   (*from memoir*) (e.g. *femoir –* a memoir written by a female comedian,   *foodoir -* a book which is both a cookbook and a memoir. A blend *of the* words*'*food*'* and *'*memoir*'*)

- *widow* (forming nouns referring to a woman whose spouse prioritizes a particular activity over other aspects of married life) (*exercise* ~ a woman who does not see her husband or partner as much as she would like because he spends a lot of time on a hobby). Other examples include *computer* ~, *gamer* ~, *football* ~);

- *vore –* (modelled on carnivore or herbivore) *e.g. femivore* **-** a woman who chooses to look after her home and family as her main job, and who grows and provides food herself as much as possible. As highlighted by Carey (2015) in his post on Macmillan Dictionary Blog " *femivore*'s success as a neologism seems to hang in the balance, both because it breaks the rules of pattern-matching conventionally associated with winning neologisms, and, perhaps more importantly, because its meaning – a complex balance of attitudes to feminism, food and ecological responsibility – seems particularly difficult to unpack;

- *vine* (modeled on grapevine) (*blogvine* **-** the way in which information spreads quickly from one person to another through the blogosphere).

6.4. Lexical –Semantic level

Ludic techniques may be identified at the lexical as well as lexical-semantic levels and may produce a desired ironic, humorous or pragmatic effect due to semantic approximation of the prototype and the resulting words:

1) borrowings are not common among ludemes,

e.g. *al desko* (eat at one's desk/computer;< Italian *al fresco-* eating outside)

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2) semantic shift s due to semantic analogy. These examples are quite interesting in that they demonstrate the linguistic creative capacity of the coiner based on the extralinguistic background knowledge of both the coiner and the user of the word

e.g. *Facebook fasting* **-** to reduce time spent on social networking activity**;**

Coffee Party **-** *a* political movement *in the US which has* formed *in* opposition *to the Tea Party Movement*;

Mojito curtain - Cuban equivalent *of the '*iron curtain*'*;

word-of-post – (modeled on word-of-mouth) gossip and news spread by online posts, particularly via social media or blogs.

6.5. Word-building level

It is at this level where half of all the ludemes in the corpus have been registered. Most productive word-building patterns proved to be blending, composition and abbreviations (initialisms) followed by shortenings (clippings mostly).

Algeo (1977) categorizes blends into 2 broad categories: syntagmatic blends (e.g. *webinar*) viewed as a contraction of two words that occur consecutively in text, and associative blends which involve source words that are related in some ways (e.g. *shopoholic*). Among the corpus data the majority of blends are associative, coined for emotive or expressive purposes. Take, for example, the concept *Brexit* (which is the most recognizable and official term for the possibility of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union; (a blend of the words 'British' or 'Britain' and 'exit'). Other examples in the Macmillan Open Dictionary show creative lexical innovations on the topic of Brexit emphasizing its various possibilities e. g. *Brexodus, Bremain, Breturn* (Open Dictionary, n.d.). Leherer (2003) in her study argues that humans recognise frequent source words more easily, especially, if there is a semantic relationship between these source words. Lexical illustrations from the corpus support this observation. e. g. *neverendum – a referendum that is proposed time and time again with the aim that people will support it because they don't want to hear more about it, wellderly – old people who are healthy*.

An interesting case is a group of ludemes coined by composition pattern : a letter abbreviation + root morpheme e. g. *ghit* (*Google hit), noogler (new Gooogle employee), chext (record a checkbook transaction using a text message*), vool (very cool)*, Frape (=facebook rape – hack into Facebook account), edress (e-mail address)*. Such words pose a challenge to the recipient to decode the word. As a rule, such words belong to communicative type of lexis frequently used in social media (e.g. Twitter, whose messages are limited to 140 characters.) The other composition models a less common (e.g. mom-in-chief – in American media a reference to Michele Obama).

6.6. Stylistic patterns

Some scholars reduce language play to word play and other stylistic devices to produce a new word or word meaning. Of all the ludemes identified at this level, *paronomasia or pun* - a play on words through the coupling of words that sound similar but which are very different semantically and etymologically (Routlege Dictionary) – is most prolific and worth commenting.

As the lexical illustrations in Table 1 show the ludemes, which are due to pun, are coined on the basis of paronymic proximity of the prototype word and the new coinage, many of them being blends, e.g. *playbourer* **-** *a person employed to play on a computer game and win virtual gold or other goods which can then be sold for real money; hairography - the* swishing *of* hair *as part of a* dance routine. Other examples demonstrate how the associative capacity of the prototype word is employed e.g. *sofalizing - the activity of using the Internet or other electronic devices to socialize with people from home, rather than meeting them face to face*. The Commentary article in Buzz Words says that *sofalizing* was coined in 2010 by online casino company Yazino, in the context of research commissioned to determine trends in how potential users interact with one another. In other words, the play on words was to meet pragmatic purposes (Buzz Word: Words in the News, n.d.).

e. g. *hus-been - a* term *which* describes *a man who is* married *to a* successful woman *and who hasn't* got *much of an* identity himself, *askhole* **-** *someone who* continually asks *for* advice *but never* follows *it*.

Examples of other ludic techniques such as *allusion* - a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing or idea of historical, cultural, literary or political significance, *hyperbole* - an unreal exaggeration to emphasize the real situation, or *understatement* – the opposite of *hyperbole* , are not numerous, yet quite forceful.

e. g *cyber Cyrano* - *a* ghost writer *who, for a* fee*,* helps *Internet daters* draft *their* profiles;

Frankenstorm - a very large and dangerous storm caused by a combination of storms and other particular   weather conditions;

nanobreak **-** a very short holiday which involves staying away from home for one night;

 copyleft - a copyright (=the legal right to have control over the work of a writer, musician, artist, etc) statement which gives any person or group the permission to freely use and/or modify a piece of work without the need for payment. The term *copyleft* is of course a play on *copyright*, based on the idea that *left* as the opposite of *right* captures the idea of preserving freedom of use as the antithesis of restricting it.

7.   Conclusion

One of the essential properties of the 21st century English neologisms is that the vast majority of them are generated and triggered by the Internet, a powerful indicator and resonator of the new vocabulary. The advent of the Internet had a strong impact on the nature, patterns and causes of coining new words in the English language. This paper was aimed at exploring the role of language play as a linguistic tool of expanding the vocabulary of present-day English. The corpus of neologisms compiled on the Internet new word resource sites revealed that language play as a linguistic cause of coining new word forms or new meanings was observed on graphical, phonetic, morphological, lexical (semantic), derivational and stylistic levels of the lexical system, derivational (or word-building) level being most representative of language play techniques instrumental in coining creative formations. Play on words as a variation of language play on a stylistic level proved an effective technique to replenish the new vocabulary with expressive words. The survival of these new coinages will depend on pragmatic, communicative, emotive or nominative needs of the language users. The relevance of language play could

be determined by the psychology of human perception: the most unusual appeals more and sustains longer.

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