

The Formalized Semantics of Neologisms-Slangisms in the Context of the English Translation of A Military Narrative

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Abstract

Each new designation associated with a designation already fixed in the language is traditionally and automatically considered a case of semantic neology and is a case of polysemy. This simplistic analysis does not take into account morphological analysis and ignores the semantic laws that govern changes in meaning. The paper examines the meaning and evolution of semantic neologisms in military English discourse. In particular, three types of neologisms can be distinguished: neologisms-borrowings, neologisms-homonyms, and semantic neologisms. The emphasis is placed on semantic neologisms since they are the ones that become a problem for translators due to the tendency to polysemy. The paper examines the neologisms of military discourse in the context of the specifics of the narrative of translations of military texts by S. Zhadan. Unlike a large number of other linguistic concepts, such as a phoneme, morpheme, the concept of neologism seems to be well known to everyone, and in general, consensus means “new word”. Based on this, one might expect unanimity in the identification and analysis of neologisms and slangisms. However, there are many discussions about the neological status of a particular lexical item. Scientists emphasize a very high rate of dispersion of linguistic new formations, without a clear differentiation between neologisms and slangisms. Therefore, in the presented work we analyse the problems of translation of semantic neologisms and slangisms on the basis of English translations of the existential specificity of the narrative of the war-themed texts by S. Zhadan “Boarding School”. The issue of the newest intuitive concept of neology and the potential of slangisms to form a formal matrix, and neologisms - a semantic one, is actualized.

Keywords: slangism, neologism, intuitive concept, formalism, semantics, language matrix, humor, irony, disdain

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The problem of language neologisms is a serious challenge for linguists. It should be noted at the outset that individual collection of neologisms and slangisms always leads to limited results, given the very small proportion of lexemes that can be actually learned by one individual. The relevance of this work lies in the homogeneity of the method used in the work - the intuitive concept of neology (Balnat & Gérard, 2022). Working within this concept, which is useful for specific studies and allows us to draw certain conclusions about linguistic neology at a given time, makes it possible to be confident in the representation of the sample. The paper also attempts to clarify the concept and identify current trends and developments in the use of matrices that appear within neologic zones. According to the intuitive concept of neology, as opposed to individual work, collective work, within the framework of semantic neology, makes it possible to collect a much larger number of neologisms and slangisms, as different points of view are added or collided. The risk is that the disparity is not completely eliminated: the sample depends on the number of people, their agreement on what a neologism is, the types of statements, the place of collection, etc. The sample is also drawn randomly from a radio program or posters, from the mass media, or from contemporary literary works of art.

There are also problems related to the exclusion corpus. We are talking about selecting only neologisms and omitting slangisms. We prefer to integrate both categories because, in addition to the above-mentioned phenomena and variations, we should not forget about the continuous evolution of language, the actualization of discourse, the question of the continuous evolution of language, and the dynamic synchrony that helps us to better approach linguistic reality in all its complexity (Huang & Xia, 2021).

1.2 Explore the Importance of the Problem

Thanks to new realities that need to be named, new lexemes and formulations appear at the level of expressiveness and precision that needs to be shown. Neologism can be formal (effect on the signifier: e.g., slang) and semantic (effect on the signifier: e.g., semantic coding). In this paper, the term “neologism” means a lexeme or expression that is not found in any of the dictionaries under consideration but occurs only once and is the author's (Huang, 2012), i.e., it is a neologism itself. Thus, the neological units in this work were identified after applying the sequential analysis. In general, it is impossible to determine when a neologism loses its neological character. Neologisms exist everywhere. The ways in which they spread are not uniform, but the possibilities of spreading are numerous.

Examples include mass media, radio, and new literary works. The lifespan of neologisms is not guaranteed. In addition to professional slang, events and people of all ages, including children and young people, are innovative forces. The media play an important role in the spread of neologisms. The more often we hear neologisms, the more successfully they are introduced into the language, which makes them easier to remember and use in speech.

We agree with Poplavskiy, Rybinska & Ponochovna-Rysak (2020) who argue that neology remains quantitatively low, despite the global scale of the war in Ukraine, the sample of neologisms and slangisms reflecting military actions is small, yet we managed to identify 60 neological lexemes and slangisms.

1.3 Describe Relevant Scholarship

In linguistics, slang is defined as a set of terms, expressions, or grammatical forms used by people in one community, a set of terms, expressions, or grammatical forms used by people of one social or professional group, by which they consciously distinguish themselves from other groups (Tilak & Sundke, 2021). Slangism refers only to the lexical level. Pronunciation and syntax are not a linguistic priority because they do not depend on the mode of communication. In this aspect, Trach, Tolmach, Chaikovska & Gumeniuk (2020) emphasize that slang is not a language but a lexicon because it borrows phonetics and grammar from ordinary language. Another point of view reveals slang as a parasitic vocabulary that feeds on the common language: slang develops from it, relying on it, drawing its main backbone from it, through a number of formation processes, specific or non-specific. According to Yoo & Jeong (2020), it is the media that plays an important role in the spread of slang.

Traditional slang, like the language of young people, is a vernacular language, i.e., a language that is commonly used in a particular community. The concept of slang is multifaceted and often has a pejorative connotation. Haspelmath (2021), studying the traditional typology of English slang, divides it into the following: 1) the slang of criminals and lower social strata, 2) professional slang, 3) commonly used slang that covers a wider range of speakers, its function no longer being encrypted. It should be noted that this study is based on the last mentioned type. In addition, the paper considers military slang, as the study was conducted based on military events in Ukraine.

According to Namestyuk, Stefurak & Rak (2021), the concept of slang does not have the same meaning in all languages. In contrast to the English concept, the Czech concept understands slang only as the language of criminals and lower social strata. Czech slang is characterized by an isolated environment. As for the other two types of English slang, the Czech language uses the terms “jargon” and “slang”. But some French slang techniques are based on the crypto-ludic function of slang. The most famous of them is verlan, which consists of the inversion of syllable order (Škrabal & Kavka, 2021). Other key techniques include largonji and Javanese, which represent older forms of slang and are rarely used (Farrell, Araque, Fernandez & Alani, 2020). But in the creation of neologisms, various processes are used, such as meaning shifting, doubling, suffixes, borrowing, truncation, etc. The main element of neologism formation is allegory and metaphor. This list proves that neologism is a gold mine of vivid imagination (Jalilbayli, 2022).

In the context of slang, Beyer (2021) explores the problem of the need for language encryption. The origin of this process is related to social groups that want to be different (thieves, students, etc.). In addition, group members recognize each other through the use of the same expressions. This function of slang is related to identity. First, the word is known only to the members of the group. Over time, the encrypted meaning spreads outside the group and becomes more widely known.

Lombard, Huyghe & Gygax (2021) study the circulation of slang terms, how colloquial common words pass into standard English. Marelo (2020) explores the vulgarity of slang. It should be noted that this issue is a subject of deep debate. The authors are convinced that slang can be rude, but never vulgar, on the other hand, there are those who believe that slang is vulgar (Pak, Kozlova, Kovalova, Tkachenko & Harmash). In this context, it should be noted that not all slangisms are vulgarisms. Vulgarisms are part of slang, and not all slang expressions are vulgar. The judgment of whether or not it is a vulgar way of expressing oneself depends mostly on the subjective attitude and situation. In this paper, slangisms are analyzed according to whether they are part of common military slang or neologisms that have emerged in the context of the war in Ukraine.

1.4 State Hypotheses and Their Correspondence to Research Design

The hypothesis of this paper continues the question of the emergence of slangisms and neologisms in the language. In our opinion,

linguistic innovations arise under the influence of the so-called “neologenic zones” - places or events that have become global and are reflected in the most widespread languages of the world, such as the war in Ukraine. Moreover, slangisms tend to form a formal matrix, while neologisms tend to semanticize.

2. Method

The article uses scientific methods that made it possible to realize the disclosure of the working hypothesis: analysis of scientific sources, information search of related scientific literature, description, deduction, induction, and the method of continuous sampling. This study is based on a double complementary approach, which involves a formalistic approach to describe slangisms, and a semantic approach to outline the semantic coloring of a sample of neologisms selected from the English translation of S. Zhadan's military prose.

2.1 Identify Subsections

To provide a linguistic characterization of the sample of slangisms and neologisms, special methods were used: linguistic description and observation, specific techniques of the structural method: distribution, contextual interpretation of lexical units.

2.2 Participant (Subject) Characteristics

This paper analyzes the English translation of Serhiy Zhadan's novel Boarding School by Reilly Costigan-Humes and Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler.

2.3 Sampling Procedures

The sample contains 60 neologisms; their structure and semantic decoding in translation were analyzed. The limitation of this work is the small number of novels by S. Zhadan (Zhadan, 2021).

3. Results

Let's consider the neologisms of form present in Serhiy Zhadan's work “Boarding School”. Translating concise and virtuosic war prose is a difficult task. The war in Ukraine has revealed the uniqueness and heroism of the Ukrainian people on a global level. At the same time, the language was also affected. Modern translations of statements and works by famous Ukrainians into English reflect Ukrainian realities and enrich English with military slang and neologisms. A neologism is a priori a new linguistic formation in terms of form and content. The results of the study showed how the realities of the war in Ukraine are reflected in English.

Each selected neologism or slangism reflects the process of war, emphasizing the imaginative thinking, irresistible optimism, and bright sense of humor of Ukrainians. In fact, out of horrific, tragic events, new concepts emerge, full of irony and contempt for the enemy. At the first stage, we selected neologisms.

S. Zhadan's military neologic lexicon is analyzed distributively, neologisms are divided into semantic elements: from pejorative to neutral. Pejorative elements usually lose their initial compositional meaning in translation. Despite the fact that they are morphologically complex and similar, from the semantic point of view they are simple words and should be considered situationally (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. English translation of semantic neologisms

Source: Reilly Costigan-Humes and Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler (2021).

3.1 Recruitment

An interesting feature revealed in the English translation of semantic neologisms is the use of prefixes *za-zu*. In fact, these are borrowed words on different bases and new words according to internal matrices, which leads to the identical morphologization of the neologism with different signifiers (in the absence of similar morphological nomenclature in English). However, the translator instinctively felt and preserved these prefixes, emphasizing that these neologisms have a vivid pejorative expression: on the one hand, they ridicule the shameful symbolism of the enemy, and on the other hand, when added to a verb, they mostly mean its elimination (Fig. 2):

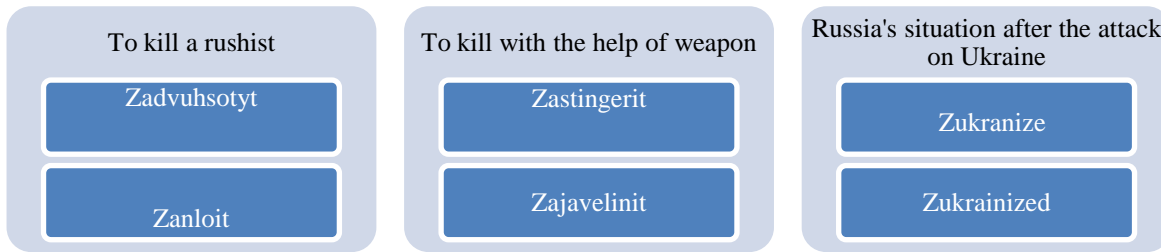


Figure 2. Atypical prefixation of semantic neologisms in English translation

Source: authors own development

Each linguistic innovation reflects the courage, the desire for victory, the bright humor, and the deadly irony of the brave soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The translators leave the imprint of the military problem in Ukrainian in a narrative sense, which allows us to analyze the transitory existentials of military topics in a deeper, axiological dimension.

3.2 Statistics and Data Analysis

Neologisms built on formally identical references would have no basis for semantic connection in two different languages. However, their formal similarity is not accidental. Based on a sample of military slangisms, we can see how sophisticatedly translators provide their translations with an updated morphosemantic definition (Table 1):

Table 1. Formal semantics of slangisms in English translation

The wear	Common weapons	Special equipment	Food	Sings of danger	The occupier	Combat losses
Cartoons - the uniform	Kalashnikov - assault rifle	Birds - night vision device	Balabas - delicious food	Disco - missile attack	Pigdogs - russian soldier	To zero - to kill
Digit - the uniform	Pok émon - assault rifle	Eyes - night vision device	Nishtyaky - smth delicious	Mirror silence - beore the attak	Vanka - russian soldier	The two hundred - the killed
Pixel - the uniform	Shaitan-pipe - assault rifle		Mamalyha - strange food	Parish - missile arrival	Pushkinist - russian soldier	The three hundred - the era of injured
Thermals - the uniform	Paddle - assault rifle		Tushnyak - meat can	Smska - missile arrival	Morders - russian soldiers	
Pedals are the boots					Canned food - russian soldier	
Cartoons - the uniform					Tiktok troops - russian soldier	
Digit - the uniform					Kadyrov's TikTok troops - chechen soldiers	

The table: author's own design

Related bases of translated slangisms can give rise to derivatives, in which case the use of a homonymic solution by the translator seems perhaps a priori less justified for derivatives of several polyseme meanings. However, if the meanings of the bases can be semantically derived from each other, the direct links between their derivatives, which exist independently of each other, are broken.

3.3 Ancillary Analyses

The paper also takes into account the neologic potential of eponymous and ononymous creations. First of all, there are accidental homonym creations, by which we mean accidental similarity, at least synchronically. A derivative most often corresponds to only one of the meanings of a polysemic word, but it is open to the speaker to create another derivative of the same form for a different meaning of this base. This is really a formal creation, not a semantic neology since there is no direct semantic connection between the two derivatives and it is necessary to correlate each of the derivatives with one of the meanings of the polysemy word.

Another mechanism is the creation of formal eponyms, which often correspond to complex lexical units (derivatives, compounds, expressions) whose conventional meaning is neither different nor predictable from that of the formants, at least in synchrony. For example:

the names of military equipment that have become neologous eponyms: *Javelin*, *Javelina*, *Chornobaivka*, *Bayraktar*, *Bakhmout*. These are the names Ukrainians give to their children, the new generation that has received the tragic status of “children of war”.

The existence of trends that are actualized over time should not be surprising, as these are cases of multiple simultaneous social creations and are the product of both semantic derivations and folk etymology.

4. Discussion

Slang is an oral set of non-technical words that appeal to a social group (Fuchs & Paschen, 2021). Slangism has a long life if it has taken root in the group to which it belongs, then it will be used by other groups. A neologism, on the other hand, is transmitted by society, it resonates with events and time. But a common feature is the fact that metaphor is present in both linguistic formations. The historical evolution of metaphor can be schematized as follows: an individual creation, in the fact of language, is initially unique and then repeated, it is absorbed and mimicked in a particular environment and its use tends to be generalized in the language (Kovalchuk & Litkovych, 2022). Slangism and neologism are metaphorical terms created and organized according to metaphorical or metonymic equations. Slangisms are structured by combining them with formal matrices, while neologisms are more inclined to organize semantic matrices. Each social group, and even each individual within it, has the right to create its own designation for any object or concept that it wishes to highlight, i.e., which belongs to its immediate environment, is useful, valuable, interesting, etc. This explains the spread and renewal of slangisms and neologisms.

As the above examples show, neoliberalism does not seem to have a discrete character. Measuring variations in neological attitudes and building tools to study them is a complex process (Mugglestone, 2021).

First of all, it should be noted that neologisms need to be studied at a given moment in time. This is not an objective concept, since the sense of novelty is valued only according to its relevance. The question of identifying a neologism often arises. It is a matter of time when a neologism becomes part of the ordinary vocabulary and is not considered a neologism (Romaniuk, & Lebid, 2022). Indeed, often technical terms, rare words that are not neologisms, but not everyone may know them, fall into the category of neologisms.

Identifying neologisms has a lot to do with lexicological skills, which are subject to great socio-cultural differences. The more educated a person is, the more he or she is able to recognize what is conventionally called a neologism. The events in Ukraine have become global in scope, with Ukrainian news in the headlines of all countries, so these neologisms have become commonplace. The society is developing a kind of lexicological intuition that makes it possible to navigate language dynamics.

In this paper, we largely follow the intuitive concept of neologism detection. To test the validity of such a modern concept of neology (Balnat & G éard, 2022), neologisms and slangisms were analyzed and sampled according to their production processes, with a focus on mass media and postmodern English texts. Thus, it was possible to recreate the grid of the semantic matrix that reflects the realities of the war in Ukraine (Aleksandruk, Palchevska & Hubyh, 2023).

In this work, we try to show that the lexical creation of slangism or neologism is subject to both the general lexicon and an arbitrary set of rules of society. Haspelmath (2021) identifies thirteen lexicogenetic matrices of English, then reduces them to twelve and organizes them into four categories, three of which (morpho-semantic neology, semantic neology, and morphological neology) are for internal matrices and one for the external matrix, which is borrowing. These matrices make it possible to take into account the English neological lexicon and borrowed neologisms.

Marello (2020), on the other hand, adopts the external loan model and insists on semantic neology. Formally, slangisms and neologisms are often the product of “semantic matrices” or metaphorical equations. By studying slangisms and neologisms that have emerged in English against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, both semantic and formal components have been identified.

Starting from this observation, we put the semantic and the formal on the same level in the presented sample. The presented sample is essentially a combinatorics of semantics and formalism - the first combinatorics is semantic and variable, manifesting itself in a hierarchical set of metaphorical or metonymic equations that raise the various seven of the neologenic zone under consideration (the war in Ukraine), and the second, formal one is unchanged and manifests itself as a closed set of possible ways of forming a neologism or slangism (prefixation, suffixation, backward derivation, composition, amalgamation, onomatopoeia, transformation, truncation, siglason, and borrowing). In other words, it is a matter of dissociating morphological and semantic neologisms and slangisms to show that they are combined as aggregate elements of the semantic field of contempt and irony for the enemy. In contrast to these claims, Lombard, Huyghe & Gyax (2021) consider only one morpho-semantic category of linguistic neologisms. For example, objects are purely formal - it is a word that denotes an object, for example, truncated or suffixed, its meaning does not change. Other neologisms denoting living beings, according to the authors, are purely semantic (the word is remotivized, but its form does not change). The above examples show, on the one hand, that in slang formal matrices can be put into effect sequentially, over time, without affecting the semantics of the metaphorical or metonymic equation that forms the semantic matrix. They show that lexical creation through metaphorization is very productive in slang, at first slangism is transparent, then it demonstrates a humorous virtuality of designation born from a mental image caused by wordplay, actualized by a metaphorical comparison. This phenomenon is found in slangisms and neologisms in both English and Ukrainian.

5. Conclusions

The article presents a sample of slangisms and neologisms in the English translation of the novel “Boarding School” by S. Zhadan. Zhadan illustrates how the formal and semantic reception of slang and neologic lexicon works and shows that slangisms, which are more mechanical, usually rely on formal matrices (they are semantized to a limited extent), while neologisms require context and the presence of

the so-called neologic zone for the formation and usually form a single semantic matrix that tends to be used permanently in the language. Eponymic neologisms are a form that undergoes successive changes starting from a prototype that may eventually be lost from sight. Thus, the slangisms and neologisms presented to us by translators Reilly Costigan-Humes and Isaac Stackhouse Wheeler make a new, original, unexpected, well-known lexicon out of the existing linguistic material, which aims to show humor, irony, confidence in victory, and the highest contempt for the enemy.

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