Neologisms

[nee-ol-uh-jiz-uh m]

Neologism

[nee-ol-uh-jiz-uh m]

noun

1. a new word, meaning, usage, or phrase.
2. the introduction or use of new words or new senses of existing words.

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COIN A NEW WORD

In 2007, at PodCamp Pittsburgh 2, a social media "unconference," some geeks were sitting around discussing web technology—and going off on tangents. According to Andy Quayle, one of the participants, "We were talking about different meats and international types of bacon and were receiving messages on our mobile devices and eventually the two mixed." A new word was born: *bacn,* which the group defined as 'email you want–but not right now.' *Bacn* refers to the email we sign up to receive—notifications from Facebook, beta announcements from startups, etc.—and never get around to reading. Bacn is spam's tastier cousin.

Being geeks, there neologists—that is, creators of *neologisms,* or new words—made a website to promote their word and asked bloggers to write about it. Their promotional efforts paid off. *Bacn* became a story. Not everyone liked the new word. Some comenters on the Bacn website pointed out that bacon, the food, is simply too delicious to serve as a good metaphor for email you never get around to reading. But the story of Bacn spread. It was covered by CNET, *InformationWeek*, *New Scientist* magazine, National Public Radio, *Wired* magazine, and even *People* magazine.

Bacn was coined to attract attention, communicate instantly, and be remembered and repeated. It worked. Notice the big story wasn't that people sign up to receive email and then don't read it. The story was that someone had come up with a funny, catchy *name* for the common phenomenon that makes us see it in an interesting light. Neologisms can be among the most powerful of micromessages.

Coined words come in many varieties. There are political epithets like

Defeatocrat; terms for new technologies and cultural phenomena like *podcast*, *greenwash*, and of course *bacn*; proprietary names for companies and products, such as *Skype*, *Technorati*, *Wii*, and more.

Almost all new words, from tech company names to political insults, result from a handful of processes familiar to linguists. Most of these processes are green: they reuse or recycle existing words. Here are seven common ways to build a new word:

Reuse an existing word (*Apple*, *spam*)

Create a new compound word by sticking two words together (*YouTube*, *website*)

Create a blend by combining part of a word with another word or word part (*Technorati*, *Defeatocrat*)

Attach a prefix or a suffix to a word (*Uncola*, *Feedster*)

Make something up out of arbitrary syllables (*Bebo*)

Make an analogy or play on words (*Farecast*, *podcast*)

Create an acronym (*GUBA*, *scuba*)

Making up a new word doesn't have to mean creating a new sound, it can also mean putting an existing sound to new use.

People often don't think of these neologisms, but the end result is essentially a new word. Remember, a word isn't just a sound or a handful of letters; what makes it interesting, what makes it a *word,* is that it has a meaning. When people use the word *word,* they sort of vacillate between meaning just the spoken and written form on the one hand, and the form plus the meaning on the other. For this reason, lexical semanticists- linguists who really take words seriously- don't even find the word *word* very useful. They use different terms when they're talking about the form alone and when they're talking about the form plus its meaning.

To put a special mark of ownership on a repurposed word, you can respell it. Respelling words serves some technical functions; as we saw in last chapter, it makes them easier to trademark (as in Rice Krispies, Cheez Wiz and Krazy Glue), it often creates a unique keyword to increase search engine visibility (as in Squidoo), and it sometimes makes it possible to acquire a meaningful ".com" domain (as in Topix, a localized news service). But respelling comes at a cost: you run the risk of seeming stupid or cheesy, or being confusing.

One of the best respelling techniques eliminates letter that aren't necessary for pronunciation. This approach achieves spelling economy, a desirable quality in a name. Flickr, for example, eliminates the *e* in the common *–er* ending. Eliminating letters that are not pronounced is a natural move, and one that children often do. At the end of his kindergarten year, my son Tobias unwittingly coined a Web 2.0 name when he described himself in a written report as "organisd."

Reusing a word- that is, giving it a new meaning- can change it forever in people's minds. *Spam,* once a brand name for a humble canned meat product, provides a perfect example. Recycling words- recombining them into new, larger units, sometimes breaking them down into their component pieces first- offers almost limitless possibilities for now coinages.

Coining words is an English literary tradition. William Shakespeare was an avid neologist. Some words that we still use today, and many others that we don't made their first appearance in one of his plays. Shakespeare's interest in new words was poetic rather than informational, however; he strove less to name new ideas than to express old ones so that they fit the cadences of his characters' voices. The poetic use of neologism goes back even further in the history of our language. Old English epic poems such as Beowulf contained numerous *kennings*, fanciful compounds that replaced simple nouns with sometimes riddlelike descriptions. For example, a ship might be described as a "sea-steed," or blood as "slaughter-dew."

Words coined for special occasions without any concern for their permanence are called *nonce* words. Perhaps one of the best known coiners of English nonce words is Lewis Carroll. Many people have encountered his nonsensical poem "Jabberwocker," which appears in the book *Through the Looking Glass* and is filled with words of Carroll's invention:

Twas brillig, and he slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe
All mimsy were the borogoves
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Humpty Dumpty later explains to Alice the meaning of part of this poem:

Well, "slithy" means "lithe and slimy." "Lithe" is the same as "active." You see it's like a portmanteau – there are two meanings picked into one word.

He also explains that the *mimsy* is a blend of *miserable* and *flimsy*.

We now have other, less literary reasons to create new words. They help us keep pace with the rapid rate of change in science, technology, business, and society. Neologism is such a salient feature of tech-obsessed American culture that there's a feature in *Wired* magazine devoted to it. The web makes tracking new words much easier than it was in the past. Several websites, such as Word Spy, are devoted solely to spotting and documenting neologisms.

Good neologisms sound fresh and perfectly natural at the same time. Naturalness results from respecting the normal cadences of speech and the sounds of the words used, as well as the meanings and grammatical functions of the component parts. Biznik, the name of a social network for independent businesspeople, is a perfect use of Yiddish-derived suffix *–nik,* which attaches to nouns and describes people who have an affinity for what the noun names *(beatnik, peacenik)*.

It's surprising how many new words are poorly constructed. The old IBM computer name Aptiva sounds off if you think of it as consisting of the word *apt* and the suffix *–ive* with a Latinate vowel at the end. The *–ive* suffix attaches to verbs to make adjectives (*creative* from *create*, *divisive* from *divide*, etc.), but *apt* is already an adjective, so Aptiva just seems a little off.

Neologism is the ultimate in microstyle, because it involves poking around under the hood of words and tinkering with their internal structure. Even if you just stick two words together to make a compound, as in YouTube, you create a word-internal

syllable boundary, which can be a sticking point in pronunciation. But what really calls for some finesse with verbal mechanics is the blend word, or *portmanteau*.

In a well-constructed portmanteau, two component words blend together seamlessly though a phonetic overlap or similarity. Consider the word *vegangelical*, a blend of *evangelical* and *vegan*. While *vegan* doesn't rhyme with the first two syllables of *evangelical*, it does have the same vowel sounds (when *evangelical* has a fully emphasized and neutral second vowel). There's also a shared "v" sound, even though it occurs in a slightly different place. The result of combining these words apt, both semantically and phonologically. Another interesting blend is *adhocracy*, a combination of *ad hoc* and *democracy*.

Bad blends try to squish words together in unnatural ways. Foodportunity, a networking event for food journalists, got its terrible name when someone stuck the whole word *food* into a spot previously occupied by a syllable consisting of only a single vowel. The huge phonetic difference between these two parts makes the neologism sound unnatural. Other bad blends fail to preserve the patterns of syllable emphasis of their component words. I like to call this phenomenon *awkwordplay*, a blend of *awkward* and *wordplay*, because that name actually demonstrates the phenomenon. If you try to pronounce the word *awkward* correctly, with no emphasis on the first syllable, then *wordplay* sounds all wrong. If you pronounce *wordplay* correctly, with emphasis on the first syllable, *awkward* gets all messed up. There's no nice, natural way to pronounce this word. A real example of awkwordplay is the name is the name Teensurance, for a teen insurance policy from Safeco. The one-syllable word *teen* requires it's own emphasis, but it replaces the un emphasized first syllable of insurance, resulting in a clunky name.

Perhaps the easiest way to create a new word is to simply stick two existing words together to make a compound. Political appellations that use this pattern to include *wingnuts* (extreme right-wingers), *moonbats* (extreme lefties), and *Islamofascists* (which uses the classical compound-forming o to connect it's two parts).

THE WORD FACTORY

Ludwig Wittgenstein, the philosopher we met in Chapter 8, compared the lexicon language to an old city. The grammatical words– auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and such– he likened to the ancient city center. There you find odd nooks and crannies that have been preserved for centuries. The vocabularies of mathematics and other technical fields he compared to orderly new subdivisions. To extend the analogy in an obvious way, brand names, URLs, and other such purpose-driven neologisms are the storefronts in the bustling commercial strips and shopping malls of the language. New ones pop up all the time, and few succeed and become enduring parts of the landscape.

Brand names, in particular, are an interesting species. Unlike most other neologisms, they sometimes seem to be made out of whole cloth: Nerf, Kodak, Oreo. They're highly artificial, designed with great care for commercial purposes, but they're bona fide words of our language. Some even make the transition from proper noun to common noun or even verb ("googled" anyone lately?). Consider some of the words that started life as proprietary names: cellophone, granola, jungle gym, martini, minivan, novocaine, pablum, pancake makeup, xerox. The list goes on.

Names don't just represent brands; they start brands. The ideas and feelings that a name evokes provide the scaffolding for a brand. Consider the name Google. Even if you don't know it's based on googol, a word coined by a child for a very large number, you probably get a playful, almost goofy vibe from it. Maybe you associate it (consciously or not) with the cartoon character Barney Google, the expression "googly eyes", or representations of baby talk like "goo goo ga ga." Now think of how well that vibe goes with Google's simple interface, the primary colors of its logo, and its reputation as fun and creative place to work. Now try to imagine the same logo and reputation being associated with the name Microsoft. Microsoft countered Google's playfulness with a fun search engine name of its own: Bing

Of course, many names are new coined words (or phrases). Most are created using the same processes that give birth to other new words. People combine existing words, and parts of words, to create new words. Take the word job, stick on the suffix *–ster*, and you've got the name Jobster. Blend the words *technology* and *literati* (or *digerati*) and you've got the name Technorati. And so on.

Usually people take the raw material of our natural shared language to construct artificial words, but today's linguistic environment is so crowded with artificial words that they've become part of the raw material. Take the name Jobdango. Why is that dang *–dango* ending dangling there? You could argue that this name blends *job* and *fandango*, the name of a dance. But there's really np sensible motivation for such a blend. Rather, this name seems to be a blend of *job* and the *name* Fandango, for a website that sells movie tickets. The name Fandango is based on the word for dance, but it's kind of a pun, because the site is for movie *fans*. Jobdango seems to be sort of a nod to the movie ticket site; it says, "I'm like Fandango for jobs."

So the artificial word *Fandango*, based on the natural word *fandango*, becomes the raw material for the artificial word *Jobdango*. The artificial is built out of the artificial. It's like what you find in music with sampling, or in food with the Dairy Queen Blizzard, which uses candy bars as raw ingredients in milkshakes. And now *–dango* has taken on a life of its own, appearing in names like Handango, Zoodango, and even GodDango. It has become what linguistics call a *cranberry morpheme*, a meaningless word part that, like *cran-*, is left when you chop a meaningful part off a word.

The *–dango* phenomenon shows the historical process of language change being initiated and accelerated through naming. It invites another analogy to biological evolution: naming is

to language change as breeding is to evolutionary change in domestic animals. Humans speed up and direct the process of evolution by selecting for traits that they like in their animal companions—random variation and artificial selection, if you will. It's similar with naming. For the most part it works with word formation strategies that lead to language change organically but accelerate the process through conscious human choice. The emergence of the *-dango* cranberry morpheme is a good example. It's possible to imagine a historical scenario in which the name Fandango is reanalyzed by speakers is including the word *fan,* and that leads to the emergence of the *-dango* suffix in an organic way.

Where will this process lead? The crowded space of names might create a need for more complex ways to create names. A blend, for example, is normally made out of just two seamlessly combined words, but it can be made out of three. The second part of the name Bare Escentuals manages to combine the words *essential, scent,* and *sensual*. A company in Seattle is called Fabjectory, which is a blend of *fabject* and *object*. But *fabject* itself is a blend of *fabricated* and *object*, coined by science fiction writer Bruce Sterling. This is a complicated name, but complexity is a natural adaptation to a challenging environment.

THE VERBAL REAL ESTATE MARKET

Just how competitive is the space of names? In 2006 there were already more than six million businesses in the United States (and more than half a million new ones were created that year alone). Of course, every one of them has a name.

The US Patent and Trademark Office has over a million and a half active trademark registrations, and more than 350,000 new registrations were filed in 2009. To put that into perspective, by some estimates the average English-speaking adult knows about 40,000 words. The number of active US trademarks is more than thirty times larger than the common English vocabulary (and the number of existing business names is about six times the number of active trademarks).

As daunting as the number of business names and trademarks is, things look even worse when you consider the web. Naming is no longer just for corporate marketing departments and entrepreneurs who invest their life savings in a business. It's for everyone with an interest in personal branding. And that's everyone. This is the age of blogs, micro-startups, and eBay stores run by people in their pajamas. All these projects need names.

This universal participation makes naming more difficult than ever. The web is now a crucial marketing platform, and naming means finding available Internet domain names. The vast universe of existing domain names makes it difficult to be both meaningful and distinctive.

Internet infrastructure company VeriSign reports that by the fourth quarter of 2009, over eighty million ".com" domains were registered and 192 registrations across all the top-level domains (".org," ".net," etc.), with about eleven million new registrations made in the last quarter of 2009. According to Technorati CEO David Sifry's report "The State of the Live Web" for 2007, there were more than seventy million blogs, and 120,000 new ones were created every day.

As the forces driving the artificial growth of our vocabulary grow stronger, things are looking bright for neologism.

Christopher Johnson
Microstyle: The Art of Writing Little
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Neologism

[nee-ol-uh-jiz-uh m]

noun

1. a newly coined word or expression
2. the introduction or use of new words or new senses of existing words.

BAGEL BUTTON

(bey-guh-l-buht-n)

noun

When a bagel, or dense bread role, is made and the hole does not form correctly, instead there is a indent on either end of the bagel, not a ring.

1. *This morning I had a pumpkin Bagel Button for breakfast;* 2. *I got a dozen bagels and found two Bagel Buttons out of the mix.*

[bagel + bellybutton]

Bellybutton Americanism

Bagel Yiddish beygl; compare dialectal German Beugel

BLOMATOSE

(blo-ma-tos)

adj.

When you are full but cannot stop eating because the food is so good.

1. *The food during the holidays is so delicious I keep eating. I end up so full I am blomatose.*

[bload + comatose]

bloat from the Middle English blout or blowt , adopted forms of Old Norse blautr meaning soft and comatose from Greek kÐmat-, kÐma meaning deep sleep, lethargy.

CREEP-SCROLL(ER)

(kreep-skrohl-ehr)

verb, noun

1. When one looks through someone elses social media sites deep into the past; 2. Someone whom always looks far into other people's social media.

1. After recieving many likes on pictures posted over a year ago she realized that she had become a victim of a creep-scroller; 2. Once Sam realized he was looking at posts from over six months ago, he caught himself from doing a creep-scroll any further.

[creep + scroll]

Creep Old English crÐopan 'move with the body close to the ground,' of Germanic origin; related to Dutch kruipen . Sense 1 of the verb dates from Middle English.

Scroll Middle English scrowle; blend of scrow, aphetic variant of escrow and rowle roll

CRISPIAC

(krisp/ee/ak)

adjective.

A person or thing that collects clean-cut, neat and well pressed money.

1. That woman is a crispiac; 2. Only a crispiac would appreciate this newly printed money.

[crisp + maniac]

Crisp–Old English, Maniac–1595-1605; < Medieval Latin maniacus of, pertaining to madness.

CUTEHEART

(kyoot/hahrt)

noun.

A name to call someone that is cute and funny, but not very sweet. So instead of calling the person a sweetheart, they are referred to as a cuteheart.

1. You're cute, but not very sweet so you're a cuteheart; 2. Awe, you're a little cuteheart.

[cute + heart]

Cute–1615-25; aphetic variant of acute, Heart–Middle/Old

DEADCHECK

(ded-chek)

verb

Repeatedly checking ones cellular phone after consciously knowing it is dead.

My phone was distracting me for quite some time until I saw it reach 1% battery. It died and from that point on I think I deadchecked atleast eleven times. It doesn't really surprise me though because I deadcheck a lot.

[dead + check]

Dead- Middle English deed

Check- Middle English chek

DUNKRUPT

[deNGk, rept]

noun

When one runs out of money from frequntly buying items at Dunkin' Dounuts.

1. Can't do breakfast today I'm Dunkrupt; 2. I have been to Dunkin' so many time this week I've gone Dunkrupt.

[dunkin'donuts + bankrupt]

Dunk[in' Donuts]

Bankrupt Medieval Latin banca rupta bank broken; replacing adaptations of Italian banca rota and French banqueroute in same sense

INTOXIQUEEN

(in-täk-si-kwƉn)

noun

Being intoxicated and over dramatic

1. Why are you being such an intoxiqueen?; 2. Whenever you drink you become such an intoxiqueen.

[intoxicated + queen]

Intoxicated: Late Middle English (in the sense 'poison'): from medieval Latin intoxicare, from in- 'into' + toxicare 'to poison,' from Latin toxicum

Queen: Old English cwƉn, of Germanic origin

ITTACHED

(eye-TtÄCHêd)

verb

1. The act of an individual whose eyes are constantly attached to their iPhone.

2. Constant texting, updating social media, or using the internet on ones' iPhone which becomes such an obsession that they don't particpate in human interaction.

1. I hate when you are iTtached while driving, you barely even look at the road!; I know you don't know what I said because you are too iTtached and did not even listen.; 2. Put down the phone and stop being so iTtached.

[eye + attached]

Eye origin: Germanic, Old English, Dutch, Attached origin: old french, germanic

LATEBACK

(lƉt-bak)

n.

When you think of a clever comeback after it's too late to say it.

My friends always come up with the wittiest comebacks but I can never think of any. Finally, when I came up with a good one it turned out to be a lateback.

Derived from comeback [meaning to comeback at, first seen in George Ade's Artie] and late [Old English læt meaning slow].

MOMBOOK

(Mom-bo͞o͞k)

noun

1. Social network which mothers' post statuses about motherhood or baby pictures continuously.

2. An online website that Mothers' join together to give their opinion on motherhood and complain about their baby, baby daddy, or other mothers.

1. I was on Mombook earlier today and Jerica posted a picture of her babies dirty diapers.; I am going to post these baby shower photos on Mombook later today!; 2. Whenever my baby daddy goes out for the night and leaves me alone with the baby, I am going to post a status on Mombook about how wrong it is.

[mom + facebook]

Mom origin: English, Book origin: Old English, Dutch, German

RANDSACK

(rand sækt)

verb

1. When Randall Hoyt tears apart your design work

1. I'm sorry you were randsacked in class today, that sucks; 2. I'm going to randsack Karleigh in class today.

[randall + sack]

Randall: Masculine name from the English origin

Sack: Old English sacc, from Latin saccus 'sack, sackcloth,' from Greek sakkos, of Semitic origin.

SIMPLICIATE

(sim-plih-si-eit)

verb

The act of appreciating simple things.

She was at the river all day and it was clear she could simpliciate because she had been amused by the reflection of the sky in the ever-changing water for hours.

[simple + appreciate]

Simple- Middle English: from Old French, from Latin simplus

Appreciate- from late Latin appretiat

SPELLFART

(spel-färt)

noun–English

1. Writing a word over and over again and forgetting how the word is spelled.

1. I get spellfarts everytime I try to write the simplest word; 2.My spellfarts are the worst on Mondays.

[spell + fart]

Spell- middle english: shortening of Old French espeller, from the Germanic base of spell.

Fart- old english (recorded in the verbal noun feorting 'farting').

SPOOCH

(s-poo-ch)

adjective

The annoying voice people use when speaking to their pets

1. My dog only responds to me when shes being spooched at; 2. My dog hates when I spooch at her.

[speak+pooch]

Speak —old english sprecan, later specan; related to Dutch spreken and German sprechen.

Pooch— 1920s: of unknown origin.

TEXILE

(te-g-zahyl, tek-sahyl)

verb

1. When you ignore someone's attempts at communicating with you through text or email for over 48 hours; 2. When you no longer communicate with an individual through electronic communication systems.

I was getting so annoyed with my roommate in the group chat that I decided to texile them for the day; 2. Sara and Jill decided that Samatha wasn't good enough to be friends with them anymore, so they decided to texile her from all group messages.

[text+exile]

Text late Middle English: from Old Northern French texte, from Latin textus 'tissue, literary style' (in medieval Latin, 'Gospel'), from text- 'woven,' from the verb texere .

Exile Middle English: the noun partly from Old French exil 'banishment' and partly from Old French exile 'banished person'; the verb from Old French exiler ; all based on Latin exilium 'banishment,' from exul 'banished person.'

Credits

Ana Clemente	Bagel Button, Dunkrupt
Karleigh Wickens	Intoxiqueen, Randsack
Kelly Gilbert	Spellfart, Spooch
Kelsy Jennison	Crispiac, Cuteheart
McKenna Sherrill	Deadcheck, Simpliciate
Olivia Gourley	Blomatose, Lateback
Taylor Troy	iTtached, Mombook
Victoria Ashly Griggs	Creep-scroll, Texile