MECHANISMS

OF THE EMERGENCE OF LEXICAL INNOVATIONS IN LANGUAGE

MECANISMOS DE LA APARICIÓN DE INNOVACIONES LÉXICAS EN EL LENGUAJE

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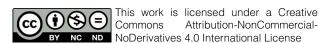*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Lexical innovation constitutes a pivotal mechanism through which languages continually adapt to evolving cultural, technological, and social landscapes. However, extant research often addresses individual processes—such as neologism formation or borrowing—in isolation, leaving an integrative understanding of their full spectrum and interplay largely unexplored, particularly in the Azerbaijani context. In this study it is investigated the mechanisms driving lexical innovation across both traditional and digital domains, aiming to classify the primary processes and elucidate the internal and external factors underpinning their emergence. Drawing upon a critical literature review and illustrative case analyses from Azerbaijani and globally circulated English terms, the research identifies a comprehensive typology that includes formal neologisms, neosemantic extensions, morphological calques, compounding, derivation, abbreviations, metaphor, and onomatopoeia, among others. It further reveals how globalization, digital communication platforms, and subcultural language practices catalyze not only the creation but also the rapid diffusion and eventual conventionalization of new lexical items. Our results contribute to theoretical models of language change by offering an integrated framework for understanding lexical dynamics in languages under intense intercultural contact.

Keywords: Lexical innovation, Language change, Sociolinguistics, Azerbaijani language, Vocabulary pedagogy.

RESUMEN

La innovación léxica constituye un mecanismo fundamental mediante el cual las lenguas se adaptan continuamente a la evolución de los panoramas culturales, tecnológicos y sociales. Sin embargo, la investigación existente a menudo aborda procesos individuales "como la formación o el préstamo de neologismos" de forma aislada, dejando en gran medida sin explorar la comprensión integral de todo su espectro e interacción, especialmente en el contexto azerbaiyano. En este estudio se investigan los mecanismos que impulsan la innovación léxica en los ámbitos tradicional y digital, con el objetivo de clasificar los procesos primarios y dilucidar los factores internos y externos que sustentan

su surgimiento. A partir de una revisión crítica de la literatura y análisis de casos ilustrativos de términos azerbaiyanos e ingleses de circulación global, la investigación identifica una tipología integral que incluye neologismos formales, extensiones neosemánticas, calcos morfológicos, composición, derivación, abreviaturas, metáforas y onomatopeyas, entre otros. Además, revela cómo la globalización, las plataformas de comunicación digital y las prácticas lingüísticas subculturales catalizan no solo la creación, sino también la rápida difusión y la eventual convencionalización de nuevos elementos léxicos. Nuestros resultados contribuyen a los modelos teóricos del cambio lingüístico al ofrecer un marco integrado para comprender la dinámica léxica en lenguas sometidas a un intenso contacto intercultural.

Palabras clave:

Innovación léxica, Cambio lingüístico, Sociolingüística, Lengua azerbaiyana, pedagogía del vocabulario.

INTRODUCTION

Lexical innovation is a fundamental process in language evolution that enables languages to adapt to new cultural, technological, and social contexts through the creation or adaptation of words. This process, understood as the introduction of new words or meanings into a language's lexicon, serves as a cornerstone of linguistic evolution since it allows languages to remain dynamic by adapting to new concepts, technologies, and/or cultural shifts (Armstrong, 2016). While lexical innovation is frequent in technical domains—where the emergence of new concepts demands precise designators—lexical innovations also proliferate in informal, literary, and digital contexts. Three main types can be distinguished: (1) formal neologisms, which are completely new words in the language; (2) neosemantic innovations, which involve new meanings assigned to existing words; and (3) borrowings and calques, which are importations of units from other languages or morphological translations (Grieve et al., 2018).

The first systematic studies on linguistic variation and change established the foundations for understanding lexical innovation as part of broader change processes. Weinreich et al. (1968) defined linguistic diffusion as the spread of linguistic innovations to new speakers and communities, emphasizing the role of social networks (Würschinger, 2021). Classical perspectives establish three phases:

- Innovation: creation or coining by individuals or specialized groups.

- Diffusion: increasing propagation within the linguistic community, initially slow.

- Conventionalization: stabilization of use and general acceptance, where the adoption curve decelerates.

Lexical innovations arise through diverse mechanisms, each contributing uniquely to the evolution of a language's lexicon. These mechanisms can be grouped into traditional processes, contemporary developments, and playful language use although the classifiaction varies among authors. Some of the most well-known are neologisms (Storjohann, 2025) or loan-words but as we will analyzed later there are many more. The relevance of studying these mechanisms lies in the fact that lexical innovations not only enrich available vocabulary but also enable speakers to express new concepts or reinterpret existing ideas more efficiently (Yuliya et al., 2023). For instance, the digitization of communication has generated terms such as selfie, hashtag, and streaming, which have evolved from neologisms to become part of everyday usage across multiple languages. Thus, these innovations can emerge spontaneously in informal contexts, such as social media or youth slang, before being adopted more broadly by society (Eckert, 2003). Understanding how and why these innovations arise involves analyzing various factors, ranging from the cognitive mechanisms that facilitate new word creation to the social and technological influences that drive their diffusion. But also, these mechanisms do not operate in isolation; rather, they are deeply influenced by the social, cultural, and communicative changes that affect linguistic communities. Moreover, they can interact with each other, facilitating the creation and diffusion of new lexical forms. Therefore, linguistic creativity is driven both by the need to express new concepts and by speakers' natural tendency to simplify and adapt language to their communicative contexts (Stojnić & Lepore, 2025).

One of the most significant factors in this process is globalization, which has facilitated the constant exchange of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices between different regions of the world. This phenomenon has led to the adoption of linguistic borrowings and the creation of neologisms that reflect multicultural influences (Kong et al., 2022; Niwa et al., 2020). For example, the term emoji, originating from the combination of the Japanese word's "e" (絵, "picture") and "moji" (文字, "character"), has been adopted in multiple languages as part of global digital communication (Telaumbanua et al., 2024). Similarly, words like selfie, originating in English-speaking contexts, have spread internationally, even in languages that lack a direct equivalent. Another crucial factor is digital communication, which has transformed how people interact and,

consequently, how lexical innovations are generated and disseminated. Social media platforms, online forums, and instant messaging systems have created an environment conducive to creating neologisms, abbreviations, and informal expressions that reflect the need for rapid and efficient communication (Zhu & Jurgens, 2021). Online writing has not only given rise to new forms of expression, such as LOL (laugh out loud) or FOMO (fear of missing out), but has also accelerated the diffusion of these terms through virality. The collaborative nature of the internet allows users to actively participate in word creation and modification, leading to the rapid acceptance of certain terms in both formal and informal contexts (Gulnazir & Zainuddin, 2025).

These social factors not only drive the creation of new words but also influence their acceptance and evolution. The interaction between globalization, communication digitization, and subcultures reflects how social changes manifest in language, generating a dynamic and continuous process of lexical innovation. Therefore, the goal of this research is to investigate and classify the mechanisms of lexical innovation in Azerbaijani and digital contexts, and to determine the internal and external factors that drive its emergence and diffusion.

DEVELOPMENT

Lexical innovations involve changes in the composition of a language's dictionary, introducing either new words or additional meanings to existing ones. These innovations can be related to the emergence of new concepts, events, or technologies. Lexical innovations can manifest themselves in both the emergence of entirely new words (for example, the word "internet") as well as the acquisition of new meanings by existing words (for example, the word "computer"). The main reasons for lexical innovations include technological development, social and cultural changes, language contact, and the natural development of language itself. Lexical innovations demonstrate that language is alive and dynamic. They provide adaptation to societal development and make language richer.

For example, in Azerbaijan in recent years, numerous new words have entered the language square through the Internet and social media: "website," "blog," "like," "post," "share," etc. As these words have been included in the composition of the Azerbaijani language dictionary, they have enabled the language to meet the requirements in this field. As is known, each field of linguistics has a specific area of study and object. Phonetics studies speech sounds, lexicology studies vocabulary, morphology studies parts of speech, and syntax studies word combinations and sentences. Speech culture, on the other hand,

is a kind of subjectless field because here, not a specific linguistic fact or any linguistic phenomenon, but a system of general methods and rules is studied. From what has been said, it is possible to conclude that speech culture is a practical (experimental) field of linguistics. Theoretical ideas and directions related to the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical rules of the literary language acquire practical significance precisely in speech culture. Ideas and instructions that have taken the form of special rules gain the opportunity for practical development through speech culture (Abdullayev, 1999, pp. 19–21).

Azerbaijan has long been one of the scientific centers of the world and the East. Azerbaijani philosophers (Shabustari, Bahmanyar), mathematicians and astronomers (Nasreddin Tusi, Ulugbek, Al-Khwarizmi, Khayyam), and literary figures (Khagani, Nizami, Nasimi, Fuzuli and others) have made great contributions to world scientific and public thought. Words borrowed from Latin and Greek, the scientific languages of the world, were also used in the works of these thinkers. It is known that Latin was the main source of vocabulary related to science and technology, as well as socio-political life. Latin was used as the language of literature, science, official documents, and religion in many European countries. Until the 18th century, scientific works were mainly written in Latin, and medicine still uses this language today. Words of Latin origin have passed into various languages of the world, including the Azerbaijani language, at different times. However, these words were borrowed into the Azerbaijani language not directly from Latin, but through intermediary languages (Gurbanov, 2004, pp. 259–265).

Great Britain, one of the most developed countries in the world in the 19th century, played a major role in the development of science and technology. This created conditions for the transfer of scientific terminology and socio-political lexicon of Latin and Greek origin to other languages of the world through English and several other European languages (Chomsky, 2016, pp. 49–51). Therefore, it would be more accurate to view words of Latin and Greek origin that have entered the Azerbaijani language as borrowings from English. At the level of specific linguistics, researchers are primarily interested in issues such as changes occurring at the phonological, grammatical, and lexical levels in related languages, the mechanisms of acquisition of language structures and elements, and the possible development paths of related languages or languages resulting from language contacts. U. Weinreich, E. Haugen, J. Bagana, V.Y. Rozentsveig, Y.A. Luktenko, A.K. Karlinsky, A.R. Rusakov and others have conducted research in this direction.

As is known, the lexicon is a very sensitive area of language to changes. However, there are layers in the lexicon that are as strong as morphology. These include pronouns, numerals and verbs, names of human body parts, natural phenomena, kinship terms, and basic social terms. Such words have existed for millennia and are very resistant to change. Therefore, if there are words of this kind among those that are alien to the language system, then we can speak not of borrowings, but of the substrate. "It is precisely the substrate and the bilingualism associated with it" that create the conditions for the transfer of words from one language to another, mainly those that are included in the lexical fund (Alefirenko, 2005, p. 65).

In connection with lexis, it is also necessary to mention some ideas about semantics and idiomatics. Semantics and idiomatics are very important areas of language that are closely related to folk psychology. When conducting research on substrate issues, it is necessary to pay special attention to these areas. When switching from one language to another, it is possible to fully learn the pronunciation of sounds in that language and master its lexicon, but it is very difficult to fully master its semantic features. According to V.A. Abayev, when determining the language substrate, it is necessary to take semantic and idiomatic features as a basis. Therefore, we can analyze these facts only when we know the language more deeply.

The morphological system of the language is more conservative and less subject to changes. This is also reflected in the substrate. The concept of substrate has had a special place in the study of languages belonging to the Indo-European language family. This concept, introduced into linguistics in the 19th century, was first applied in the 1860s-1880s by G.I. Ascoli and H. Schuchardt, and later by V. Bröndal, Y. Pokorny, A. Mey, O. Jespersen, and V.A. Terracini. In Russian Slavic studies, it was further developed by B. de Courtenay, A.A. Akhmatov, and A.N. Selishev.

It is impossible to imagine the speech of a modern person without neologisms. New vocabulary—neologisms—consists of new words that have not yet taken their place in the active dictionary. If a word is necessary for the language, it "takes root" and begins to be actively used, and after some time passes into the active dictionary. Neologisms appear in the language together with newly established realities (combine, astronaut, snickersnut). Foreign/borrowed words are words that entered the language from other languages. Borrowed vocabulary has always been a reflection of Azerbaijani history. For example, words from other languages may have entered for various reasons: 1) non-linguistic reasons—together with the object (notebook, tea, hockey, umbrella, cafe); 2) linguistic

reasons—the desire to eliminate the ambiguity, volume, and ambiguity of the Russian word (cake – muffin as a special type of cake; short-distance running – sprint). It happens that a foreign word "competes" with a Russian word: driver – driver, stagnation – stagnation, corruptor – venal (Rosenthal, 2003, pp. 48–49).

Language is a living organism that is constantly evolving, and one of the most obvious manifestations of this development is lexical innovation—that is, the enrichment of the vocabulary of the language with new words, expressions, and meanings. This process does not occur randomly but through certain mechanisms. Some of the the the main mechanisms of lexical innovations can be grouped as follows:

Neologism: Neologisms are entirely new words created to express novel concepts or fill lexical gaps. For instance, Heidegger's German terms Dasein (being) and Mitsein (being-with) introduced specific philosophical concepts. While their strength lies in their ability to precisely denote new ideas, their adoption can be slow if they are too unfamiliar or lack immediate utility.

Loan-words: These are terms borrowed from other languages to address lexical gaps, particularly in technical or cultural domains. Examples include philosophia (borrowed from Greek to Latin by Cicero) and apartheid (from Afrikaans to English). Although loan-words enrich vocabularies, they may contribute to linguistic imperialism when dominant languages overshadow indigenous terms (Fernández-Llamazares et al., 2021).

Semantic Augmentation: This mechanism involves extending existing words to encompass new meanings, often through metaphor or metonymy. For example, the English word "alienation" was semantically extended to include Marx's concept of Entfremdung. While this mechanism offers flexibility, it risks creating ambiguity if new meanings are not widely understood or accepted.

Morphological Calques: These are morpheme-for-morpheme translations from a source language, enabling precise concept rendition while maintaining the target language's morphological structure.

Translation Techniques (Conceptual Renovation): This approach utilizes existing lexicon to express new concepts, thereby avoiding loan-words or neologisms. In Ancient Rome, Caesar's De Analogia employed Latin terms for Greek ideas, while Boethius later favored more literal translations. Although this method preserves linguistic integrity, it may sacrifice conceptual precision.

Compounding and Nonce-formations: Compounding combines existing words to create new terms (e.g.,

"notebook"), while nonce-formations are context-specific creations, often found in literary works. For example, "houdini" as a verb (meaning to escape cleverly) derives from the magician Harry Houdini. These mechanisms demonstrate creativity but may remain ephemeral without widespread adoption and social acceptance.

Derivation: This is the creation of new words using the internal capabilities of the language. New units are formed by adding suffixes to existing roots or words (formative derivation) or by combining words (compound words). For example, the formation of words such as "librarian," "library," and "librarianship" from the word "book," or the formation of the word "beautiful" from the combination of the words "eye" and "hand."

Compounding: This process involves combining two or more independent words to form a single word that conveys a new meaning, thereby expanding the expressive capabilities of language. For example, "tree" + "stick" = "woodcutter," or "day" + "noble" = "sun."

Conversion (Transition of a word from one part of speech to another): This involves using a word as a different part of speech according to its function in the sentence, without any change in its morphological structure. For example, "work" (noun) derived from the word "work" (verb), or "green" (noun, e.g., "green color") from the word "green" (adjective).

Abbreviations: This mechanism involves using initials or parts of long names, terms, or phrases to create new, shorter forms. This approach is common in scientific, technical, and formal writing. For example, "Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University" becomes "ASOIU," and "World Health Organization" becomes "WHO."

Meaning Expansion and Contraction: This process involves the expansion or, conversely, contraction of the original meanings of existing words in new contexts, which leads to new semantic interpretations. For example, the word "telephone" originally meant only "landline telephone," but now it encompasses "mobile phone" or any means of communication in general (expansion). Conversely, the word "bird" once carried a general meaning but now is used more specifically in the sense of "pet bird" (contraction).

Metaphor and Metonymy: This is the process by which words acquire new, derivative meanings beyond their basic meanings through analogy or association. Metaphor operates on analogy, as seen in "leg" (body part) extending to "leg of a table" or "leg of a mountain." Metonymy functions through association, such as "iron" (metal) extending to "iron door" (a door made of iron).

Borrowing: This process involves taking words, phrases, or terms from other languages, either directly or with certain phonetic changes, and incorporating them into the vocabulary of one's own language. This occurs especially as a result of new technologies, scientific discoveries, and intercultural contacts (Kadochnikov, 2016, pp. 36–39). Examples include "computer," "internet," and "programming" (from English), as well as "restaurant" and "cafe" (from French).

Onomatopoeia (Imitation of Sound): This mechanism involves creating words through imitation of sounds or movements in nature. Examples include "ringing," "gurgling," and "buzzing."

Thus, lexical innovations are related not only to the internal regularities of the language but also to a number of external factors. Technological Development introduces new terms and concepts into the language due to the emergence and implementation of new technologies. Scientific Discoveries lead to advances in science that result in the emergence of new concepts and terms. Socio-Cultural Changes in society, including changes in political systems, fashion, and lifestyle, create the foundation for the creation of new words and expressions. Globalization strengthens international relations and accelerates the exchange of words between languages. Finally, Mass Media and Social Networks serve as platforms that allow new words and expressions to spread rapidly throughout linguistic communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Lexical innovations demonstrate the vitality, dynamism, and adaptability of a language to new realities. Understanding these mechanisms is important for comprehending how language develops and enriches itself. The study of the interaction of world languages with each other has become an important contemporary issue. In the process of language interaction, political, economic, cultural, and scientific relations among peoples play a key role. Therefore, the process of word acquisition in languages, as an objective phenomenon that plays an important role in the development of vocabulary, should be studied within the framework of all categories of the language in connection with public, social, and human thinking. Taking into account this feature of the word acquisition process, we should consider the term "loanword" to be both relative and conditional. One reason for this is that some loanwords are used in the language without necessity and are forgotten over time. Therefore, if it is possible to call a new word that enters the language a loanword for a certain period of time, it is impossible to call it a loanword after it is forgotten.

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