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Analysis on the Word-formation of English Netspeak Neologism

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of computer-mediated communication provides a resourceful database for language researchers as well as learners. This study focuses on the Internet neologisms, a derivative of new media age, which in many ways affects the netizens in terms of communication. The collected data are examined empirically to figure out the characteristics of netspeak neologisms and their patterns of formation. It suggests that the most frequently occurring word-formation process of netspeak neologisms is compounding, subsequently, blending, affixation, old words with new meaning, acronyms, conversion, and clipping. Through probing into each process, the examples are illustrated and sub-categories are listed in terms of blending for further understanding. This study has proven that the diversity of word-formation processes of English netspeak neologism and may shed light on the creativity of language in the online context.

Key words: Internet, Neologism, Netspeak, Word-formation.

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1.0 Introduction

Language of human beings has the design feature of creativity due to its duality, and the feature of duality of structure of the language system is a crucial feature of human language (Linhua, 2008). The emergence of productivity of coined words is caused by the necessary prerequisite—intended usefulness, such as labeling function, syntactic recategorization and expressing an attitude (Plag, 2002).

With the easy approach to the Internet, the language changes so quickly that if a netizen fails to follow the new emergences, it would bring difficulty to his or her online communication with others or understanding of the online information. Even when the netizens communicate offline, sometimes they would like to use the coined words that created through Internet due to their visualization and liveliness. Therefore, a new language variant comes into being with the rapid development of technology and the emergence of computer-mediated communication (CMC), which is named Netspeak, used to represent the language used by netizens in the process of CMC. The most noticeable characteristic of netspeak is the neologisms, and the essence of neologisms lies in the word-formation. As English learners, it is imperative to take conscious efforts to keep our vocabulary from being obsolete, therefore, the English netspeak neologisms as the very source of productivity of new words becomes an indispensability part that English learners have to master. When reading the latest newspapers and magazines online or listening to the English broadcast, the frequency English learners encounter neologisms is very high and dictionaries cannot always help them to find out the exact meaning as its timeliness is not satisfactory. Under these circumstances, a study on word-formation processes of English netspeak neologisms will be very helpful to the English learners to master the trends in netspeak and coined words.

In order to make quantitative research, this dissertation examined data collected from website www.wordspy.com, where English netspeak neologisms are posted. According to the word-formation rules and characteristics of netspeak neologisms, the collected data will be classified into different types and the comparison between each other will be conducted in order to make the English learners to learn the nature of English netspeak neologisms.

2.0 Literature review

2.01 Word-formation

There is a basic concept concerning with word-formation: morpheme. A morpheme can be defined as the smallest meaningful unit. The morphemes can be classified into bound morphemes and free morphemes according to whether they can constitute words by themselves, while they may classified into roots and affixes. Affixes can be further classified into derivational affixes and inflectional affixes according to their respective functions.

In this study, five word-formation processes are included. Compounding is a process in which two individual bases are combined to form a new one, such as 'greenhouse'. Affixation can be defined as the word-formation processes of attaching something to the base, and it can be subcategorized into prefixation and suffixation according to the place where the affix is added. Conversion can be defined as the word-formation processes with altering the meaning of the word instead of altering the base.

Through clipping, a new word is formed in the word-formation processes of shortening it by deleting part of the word. Blending is an integrated combination process of clipping and compounding.

2.02 Previous studies of English Netspeak Neologisms

There is no common definition for neologism among linguistics. It can be defined as “those derivatives that were newly coined in a given period” (Plag, 2002). However, a neologism does not only refer to a newly-created word but an old word with new meaning. The flux of words happens under certain contexts, such as the introduction of new ideas, new inventions, and new phenomena and so forth.

Before clearly defining English netspeak neologisms, the definition of netspeak should be provided, Netspeak is defined as:

A type of language displaying features that unique to the internet, and encountered in e-mail, chat group, virtual world and worldwide web, arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive (Crystal, 2001).

The neologisms in netspeak can be viewed as a part of English neologisms. Lots of studies on the Netspeak have been conducted from different perspectives such as sociolinguistics, discourse analysis. The study on netspeak began earlier abroad. In the year 1997, University of Hartford hosted a conference on “Internet and language”. The status of English in netspeak, education by Internet was discussed. Then another Netspeak-study conference was held in Spain after six years. These two conferences are the landmarks of research on netspeak in linguistic circle. In China, the study on netspeak began eleven or twelve years ago. The representative work on netspeak *An Introduction to Netspeak* (Genyuan, 2001) displays a systematic analysis of the lexical features of Chinese netspeak.

The study on netspeak covers broad categories, such as the style of netspeak, the linguistic features of netspeak as well as the regulation of netspeak. However, compared with grammar and pronunciation of netspeak, the words are the most important feature of netspeak. A lots of studies on the English netspeak neologisms have been conducted, however, as the neologisms have the feature of timeliness, it is necessary to collect the recently netspeak neologisms to do the research which is extremely important for the study of new words.

3.0 Data collection and analysis

According to the definition of Netspeak, www.wordspy.com is chosen as the data resources for this web site is designed for collecting coined words and provides people a platform to rank all the new words, what’s more, it also posts the new words in different categories, and the subdivision Internet under category Computer is chosen for analysis, and there are total 210 words.

3.01 Compounding

It is an undeniable fact that compounding is the way used most frequently in creating neologisms. Among all the data the author collected, it can be calculated that compounds constitute 73.8% of all the neologisms. The formation of compounding words can be analyzed from the perspective of their structures.

According to the structure of compounding neologisms, they can be divided into three types:

(1) New words formed without space and hyphen between two component words, such as arachnerd, fleshmeet.

Arachnerd: noun. (n.) A person who spends a great deal of time either surfing the Web or fussing with their home page.

'Arachnerd' is a compounding word by combining adjective word 'arach' and noun 'nerd' together. 'Arach' here can be conceptualized as the Internet for its original meaning is something like spider's net. According to Ingo, such kind of compound words should be viewed as modifier-compounds for arachnerd is a kind of nerd.

Fleshmeet: n. A meeting in the flesh, especially one composed of people who usually or only converse online.

'Fleshmeet' is made by combining noun 'flesh' and verb 'meet' and means people chatting online make a date to see each other in the real world. The word 'flesh' here is used lively for it is part of human body, here can be considered it is a metonymy for it is used to stand for the whole person but not only flesh of our bodies. It can also be considered as a modifier compound for it is a kind of meeting.

(2) New words formed with hyphen by two or two more words, such as drop-dial, get-rich-click.

Drop-dial: verb (v.) To drop a user's existing Internet connection and then dial up a new connection that offers a service (such as a video or concert) over a premium-rate phone line.

'Drop-dial' is a verbal compound made by combining two verbs 'drop' and 'dial' with a meaning that it is an action sequence. After you drop your connection, you dial a new connection to get an online experience.

Get-rich-click: adjective (*adj.*). Relating to people who want to get rich either through online investing or by creating an Internet-related business. (Cf. *get-rich-quick.*)

'Get-rich-click' is an adjective compound by combining three words with two hyphens. According to Wordspy's definition of this word, it can be found that it can be viewed as an analogy of get-rich-quick by replacing quick by click, transferring from the speed to the approach. However, it can also be considered as a process of getting rich by clicking the mouse.

(3) New words formed with space and without a hyphen by two component words, such as silent run, flash mob.

Silent run: The mass transfer of funds out of a troubled bank by online

This word is made by combining an adjective 'silent' and verb 'run' to illustrate a phenomenon. The same with 'flash mob', it is also used to describe an emerging phenomenon. This kind of formation can reflect that the meaning of two component words are not closely connecting with each other by comparison with the compounds with hyphen or without space.

Referring to the grammatical perspective of the formation of compounds, they can be divided into three kinds of compounds: noun compounds, verb compounds and adjective compounds. Among them, noun compounds constitute 93.5% of all the compounds while there are only three adjective compounds and seven verb compounds.

3.02 Blending

Blending is the combination of clipping and compounding in which new words are created by the overlap of words or fragments of existing words, such as emotags from emotion and tag and Gootube

from Google and Youtube. All the blending neologisms in this dissertation can be classified into three kinds of formation: head+word, head+tail and word+tail.

(1) head+word

Taking 'emotags' for example:

n. Mock HTML tags used in writing to indicate emotional states.

From the meaning that Wordspy gives, it can be figured out that this word is from the clipping of word 'emotion' and complete word 'tag' with the meaning that tags used for express emotions. 'E-mentor' and 'E-fence' are typical blending words by clipping of word 'electronic' and combining it with other words.

(2) Head+tail

Taking 'wedsite' for example:

Wedsite: n. A website where a couple posts information about their upcoming or recent wedding. [Blend of *wedding* and *website*.]

It can be found that it is from the clipping of 'wedding' and 'website' to refer to a website used by a couple to record and post their information. However, if netizens do not know how this word comes from, they probably assume it as the misspelling word of word 'website'.

(3) word+tail

Taking 'viewser' for example:

Viewser: n. A person who watches video content online or on a computer, or who combines regular TV watching with related digital content. [Blend of *viewer* and *user*.]

From the meaning of this word, it can be inferred that the first word plays a relative important role in the whole meaning of the word. 'ser' from 'user' can be viewed as sub-category of everything related to action 'view'. From the list, it can be found that the initials of three blending words are word 'Web', therefore, all these words can be considered as the 'product' that web makes.

3.03 Affixation

There are totally 13 derivatives created through form of affixation. They are defriend, domainer, fakester, gamification, griefer, Internetese, piggybacker, shilling, sniping, streamies, ungoogleable, Weblish and wikification. According to the positions of affixes occupy in the words, they can be divided into prefixation and suffixation.

From all the 13 derivatives, only 'defriend' and 'ungoogleable' can be classified into prefixation. Taking 'defriend' for example, 'de' here means concellation. By adding it to word 'friend', its meaning is that one netizen removes a person from one's list of friends on a social networking site.

Since suffixation refers to adding a suffix to a base, it can be found that the all the words under classification 'affixation' except 'defriend' can be viewed as the members of suffixation. However, when all the suffixation words are analyzed, the phenomenon that the meaning of created words by adding suffix to its base cannot be directly got from its literal or conventional meaning, taking 'griever' for example, suffix 'er' is usually used to add to a verb to refer to the agent to do the action. However, the 'er' here cannot be conceptualized in that way, here 'er' means that the people who intentionally and repeatedly harasses other users in a game, forum, or similar online venue. In brief, 'griever' is not the one who is full of grief but the one who brings lots of grief to other netizens.

3.04 Acronyms

There are only two words are created by combining the initial letters of several words, they are 'captcha' and 'MOOC'. 'Captcha' is an acronym for Completely Automated Public Turing Test to Tell Computers and Humans Apart, and it refer to a computer-generated test that humans can pass but computer programs cannot. 'MOOC' is an acronym for massive open online course. With the emergence of Internet, lots of MOOC occur and they can help those who do not have time for school learn lot from these courses.

3.05 Conversion

As same as acronyms, there are also two words is created by conversion whose meaning is that the form of the word keeps unchanged but the class of the word changes. 'Google' and 'friend' can be classified into this category. It is familiar for netizens that 'Google' is a search website as well as a brand. However, when people search something by using it, they will just say 'google it' by taking it as a verb which can also be found in Chinese brand 'Baidu'. 'Friend' here means that on a social networking website, to add a person to one's list of acquaintances, and vice versa.

3.06 Clipping

There is only one word created through clipping, blog which is from weblog. Blog as a newly created product of Internet used by netizens to write down their diaries and post some information or photos and friends can leave some words on their friends' blog.

3.07 Old words with new meaning

There are totally five words are given new meanings to be used by people as a new word, they are bookmark, chiclet, flame, sticky and unstrung.

Taking 'unstrung' for example:

Unstrung: *adj.* Describe a person or technology that uses wireless communications to access the Internet.

From its original meaning, it is a derivative of strung which is the past participle of word 'string' bu adding prefix 'un'. Since computers can be used to access the Internet by using Wifi, such kind of computer can be called 'unstrung' or people who use wifi to surf on the Internet. The common point of these five words is that all their new meanings are closely related with Internet.

3.08 Hard to define

It is inevitable to find out the irregular coined words which are not concord with any one of the above word formation rules. Therefore, it is necessary to find out how they are created and why. There are totally nine words created to be the members of category "hard to define". They are bitcom, folksonomy, gator, phishing, sextuple-u, triple-u, typosquatter, voken and webrarian. Among them, sextuple-u and triple-u have the same meaning of www. Taking 'folksonomy' for example,

Folksonomy:.. An ad hoc classification scheme in which Web users apply their own keywords to site

content as a way of categorizing the data they find online.

From the meaning of this word, it can be easily found out that 'onomy' is from word 'taxonomy', if this word is divided into 'folk' and 'sonomy', it seem like plausible, however, if this word is read for several times, this word can also be considered as the combination of 'fol' and 'ksonomy' which is the part of pronunciation of 'taxonomy'.

The same analysis can also be applied to word 'phishing' which is explained as: the term phishing comes from the fact that Internet scammers are using increasingly sophisticated lures as they "fish" for users' financial information and password data. It can be explained that 'phishing' is from the word 'fish' and also borrows some meaning from it to some extent.

4.0 Conclusion

By analyzing all the 210 neologisms under the category Internet posted by www.wordspy.com, the conclusion that compounding is the way used most frequently when netizens create new words. Among which, noun compounds constitute 93.5% of all the compounds. Blending is also an important way for people to make new words and there are totally three kinds of formation in terms of their respective components. When netizens use affixation to create derivatives, the meaning of coined word is needed to be considered twice, such as 'unstrung' and 'griever'. There are also nine neologisms hard to define which word-formation rule they apply. Among them, phishing, folksonomy, sextuple-u and triple-u are created by the pronunciation of the original ones. It can be easily found out that 'web', 'net', 'casting' are used frequently to form new words either as a part of a compound or a part of a blending word. The reason is that these three words are most closely related to Internet, therefore, the words which have any close relation with them are coined for netizens to use.

The Internet is going to record the linguistic diversity more fully and accurately than was ever possible before, and the creative potential of the new medium is forming new areas of expressions (Crystal, 2001). This quantitative study observes the diversity and novelty of word-formation processes of English netspeak neologism. Compared to the word-formation processes in the offline communication, the ones in the computer-mediated communication display their close relations to the context. The netizens create coined words to fulfill their foremost goals in communication to produce utterances that most accurately convey his or her intended meaning (Gerrig, 1988). Therefore, the netizens employ different word formation processes to facilitate online communication, making it more vivid and remarkably diversified.

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Appendix A: Tables and Figures

Table 1: Classification of Word-formation Processes of Internet Neologisms

	Number	Proportion	Examples:
Compounding	153	72.9%	arachnerd, podcasting, slashdot effect
Blending	25	11.9%	altmetrics collabulary cybrarian
Affixation	13	6.2%	defriend domainer ungoogleable
Acronyms	2	1%	captcha, MOOC
Conversion	2	1%	friend, google
Clipping	1	0.5%	blog
Old words with new meaning	5	2.3%	bookmark chiclet flame sticky unstrung
Hard to define	9	4.2%	bitcom folksonomy gator Phishing sextuple-u triple-u typosquatter voken Webrarian
Total	210	100%	

Table 2: Classification of Blending Neologisms

head+word(5)	head+tail(11)	word+tail(9)
Altmetrics	Vlog	Songlifting
Emotags	Collabulary	Twitterverse
Internet	Cybarian	Viewer
E-mentor	Digilante	Fiberhood
E-fence	Gootube	Googleganger
	Juvenoia	Webology
	Spime	Web-isode
	Vortal	Knowbie
	Wikiality	Websumer
	Ubiquilink	
	Wedsite	

Appendix B: Data

Internet: (210)

Altmetrics	camgirl	crowd mining
ambient findability	captcha	crowdsourcing
arachnerd	CGI Joe	cyberbalkanization
bid shielding	Chiclet	cybercasing
bitcom	click laundering	cyberchondriac
black-hole resort	clickprint	cyberdisinhibition
Blog	clickstream	cyberflaneur
blogosphere	cobweb page	cybergripping
bookmark	collabulary	Cyber Monday
breadcrumbing	computational grid	cyberpiracy
browsewrap	crowdfunding	cybersquatting

cybervigilantism	information scent	sniping
cybrarian	Internetese	social bookmarking
cyburban myths	Internet time	socially produced
dancing baloney	Internet	social media
darknet	invisible Web	social networking
deep link	juvenoia	social networking fatigue
defriend	knowbie	sock puppet
dial tone	life casting	songlifting
digilante	link rot	spear phishing
digital dualism	macarena page	spamdexing
digital nomad	meatspace	spime
dirt road	microbrowser	sticky
distance work	microchanne	streamies
domainer	modem cowboy/cowgirl	Streisand effect
doorway scam	MOOC	superdistribution
dot con artist	mousetrapping	tele-fusion
drop-dial	mullet strategy	touchdown center
earballs	multi-channel shopping	triple-u
edupunk	multipath movie	tweetup
e-fence	music service provider	type-in traffic
egosurfing	nanopublishing	typosquatter
e-mentor	neogeography	Twitterverse
emotags	netco	ubiquilink
Evernet	Netlag	ungoogleable
fakester	Netspeak	unstrung
fan edit	nooksurfer	vertical portal
fiberhood	one-link wonder	videophilia
filter bubble	Outernet	Viewser
Flame	page-jack	Vlog
flash campaign	pancake people	vodcasting
flash crowd	parasitic computing	virtual visitation
flash mob	password fatigue	virtual volunteering
fleshmeet	password trap	voice portal
folksonomy	personal portal	WAPlash
fridge Googling	Phishing	war chalking
friend	photolurker	Web bug
friendsourcing	Pierre Salinger syndrome	Web 2.0
Gamification	piggybacker	White list
gak factor	placeshift	voken
gator	podcasting	vortal
geotagging	podcatching	Webcast wedding
get-rich-click	pop-under	Web cramming
godgasting	porn sifter	web-isode
google	portal site	Webjack
googleability	power newbie	Weblish
Google bombing	print clone	webmail
Googleganger	Puddle phishing	Webology
Googlejuice	read-only user	Web rage
Googleverse	reputation bankruptcy	Webrarian
GooTube	scam baiting	Websumer
Griever	search jack	website
guru site	self-tracker	Wi-Fi squatter
hard launch	sextuple-u	wikiality
hardlink	shilling	wikification
heroinware	silent run	Wikigroaning
hit-and-run page	six degrees patent	Wikipedia kid
horizontal portal	skyscraper ad	workshifting
hot spot	slash dot effect	
information foraging	slivercasting	