

Semantic Shift in Digital Communication: The Impact of Social Media on Language

Usmonova Gavkharoy Ismoiljon qizi
usmonovagavharoy1102@gmail.com

MA student

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Annotation: This article explores the semantic evolution of language on digital media platforms, focusing primarily on social media. With the rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC), especially through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Telegram, there has been a rapid emergence and diffusion of neologisms. Traditional words often gain new, context-specific meanings, while brand-new terms are coined to reflect digital experiences. The study employs a qualitative and descriptive methodology to analyze these lexical changes and their implications for both general and specialized registers. The findings show that digital discourse is reshaping language dynamically, with English at the forefront of this innovation. Such changes illustrate how linguistic systems adapt in response to technological and societal shifts, highlighting the flexibility and creativity embedded in modern communication.

Keywords: Semantic change, neologisms, social media, digital communication, computer-mediated communication, lexical innovation

Семантические изменения в цифровой коммуникации: влияние социальных сетей на язык

Усмонова Гавхарой Исмоилжон кизи
usmonovagavharoy1102@gmail.com

Студент магистратуры

Узбекский государственный университет мировых языков

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается семантическая трансформация языка под воздействием цифровых медиа, особенно социальных сетей. В условиях стремительного развития компьютерно-опосредованного общения (СМО) на платформах Facebook, Instagram, YouTube и Telegram наблюдается активное появление и распространение неологизмов. Традиционные слова обретают новые значения в цифровом контексте, а также формируются совершенно новые термины. В работе применяется качественный и описательный подход к анализу лексических изменений. Результаты исследования показывают, что цифровая коммуникация динамично меняет язык, и английский язык выступает в роли главного новатора в этом процессе. Эти изменения отражают адаптационные возможности языков в ответ на технологические и социальные трансформации.

Ключевые слова: Семантические изменения, неологизмы, социальные сети, цифровая коммуникация, СМО, лексические инновации

Raqamli mulqotda semantik o'zgarish: Ijtimoiy tarmoqlarning tilga ta'siri

Usmonova Gavharoy Ismoiljon qizi
usmonovagavharoy1102@gmail.com

Magistratura talabasi

O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Annotatsiya: *Ushbu maqola raqamli media platformalari, ayniqsa, ijtimoiy tarmoqlarda tilning semantik o'zgarishini tahlil qiladi. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube va Telegram kabi platformalarda kompyuter vositasidagi muloqot (CMC)ning rivojlanishi natijasida yangi neologizmlar tezkorlik bilan paydo bo'lmoqda. An'anaviy so'zlar yangi kontekstda boshqa ma'no kasb etmoqda, ayrim yangi atamalar esa raqamli tajribani ifodalash uchun yaratilmoqda. Ushbu tadqiqot sifatli va tavsiflovchi uslubda olib borilib, leksik o'zgarishlar va ularning ijtimoiy, rasmiy sohalaridagi ta'sirini ochib beradi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, ingliz tili ushbu jarayonda yetakchi bo'lib, zamonaviy muloqotda tilning moslashuvchanligi va ijodkorligini namoyon etmoqda.*

Kalit so'zlar: *Semantik o'zgarish, neologizm, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar, raqamli aloqa, CMC, leksik innovatsiya*

Introduction

As individuals progress through different phases of life, noticeable shifts occur in their preferences, habits, and conversational themes. This natural evolution reflects a universal truth: all living entities are subject to transformation. Language, as the most essential and dynamic tool of human communication, is no exception. Much like organisms, languages develop, adapt, and evolve over time. Though such linguistic changes may not always be overtly recognized by speakers, the emergence of new vocabulary is a constant phenomenon. Every now and then, we encounter unfamiliar words, idioms, or expressions that have been assimilated into everyday speech. These freshly introduced and gradually accepted lexical items are commonly referred to as neologisms (Pavol, 2002).

According to Malec and Rusinek (2015), linguistic evolution frequently results in the generation of neologisms. Jean Aitchison offers a classification of the causes behind these developments into two primary domains: external and internal factors. External influences are primarily sociolinguistic in nature, encompassing the broader social, technological, and cultural contexts in which language is used. Internal influences, on the other hand, refer to psycholinguistic aspects, such as the cognitive and structural elements that reside within both the human mind and the language system itself.

Katamba (2005) highlights technological advancement and digitalization as significant external forces contributing to linguistic transformation. Over the past few decades, rapid technological progress has had a profound impact on nearly every facet of society-including language. One of the most influential developments has been the rise of social media. This form of digital communication has permeated virtually all areas of life through a myriad of websites and mobile applications. Social media platforms are not only widespread but also linguistically innovative. The predominance of the English language on such platforms has led to the creation of novel terms that have swiftly disseminated across different speech communities around the world.

What makes this linguistic expansion unique is that it is not confined to English alone. As English-based neologisms are adopted globally, other languages incorporate these new words into their own lexicons, demonstrating how globalized communication fosters multilingual vocabulary growth.

The digital era has further introduced the phenomenon of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which encompasses various forms of digital discourse such as emails, texts, forums, and social media interactions. The rate at which language is evolving today, especially due to CMC, is unprecedented. The speed and reach of online interactions have amplified the creation and spread of neologisms to a degree never before witnessed. Crystal (2005) predicted that the English language of the 21st century would be profoundly shaped by CMC. His later works (2006) introduced the concepts of "Netspeak" and "Cyberspeak" to describe this evolving linguistic style unique to online environments.

As Fowler (1983) asserts, effective communication within any linguistic community depends heavily on both articulate speech and a well-developed vocabulary. The English lexicon is exceptionally dynamic due to its historical openness to foreign influences and its inherent capacity for lexical innovation (McCarthy & Dell, 1994).

In contrast to the prescriptive view held by some 17th and 18th-century scholars, who argued that language should remain static and unchanging, contemporary linguistic thought acknowledges change as a fundamental and necessary component of any living language.

Language evolves not only in structure but across all functional domains, including registers and semantic fields. For example, since the inception of English, many new registers have emerged, and numerous words have been assigned new or multiple meanings depending on contextual usage (Lyons, 1995).

Algeo (1993), in his work *Among the New Words*, explores the social origins and initial usage of numerous expressions, shedding light on how societal changes catalyze linguistic evolution. Pranjić (2016) adds that neologisms are birthed in diverse settings and for multiple reasons. Their widespread use in day-to-day communication, especially through digital platforms, reflects their practical importance. The growth of CMC has significantly accelerated the rate at which new lexical items are introduced and adopted.

Social media terms have become particularly influential in shaping registers within English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These words and expressions are no longer confined to informal online exchanges but have become part of specialized vocabularies. Crystal (2006) emphasizes the internet's transformative effect on English, arguing that it has given rise to a unique linguistic register shaped by redefined word meanings and creative usages. Thorne and State (2003), in their review of *Language and the Internet*, affirm that digital communication has fostered the birth of abbreviations, emoticons, and newly minted terms.

Many of these changes stem from the recontextualization of existing vocabulary. Words such as "wall," "poke," "tag," and "share," which had specific pre-internet meanings, have acquired entirely new connotations within the context of social networking sites like Facebook. Stern (1975) attributes such shifts in meaning to psychological factors. He suggests that users' creative inclinations, particularly in digital interactions, drive the reimagining of existing words and the invention of new ones.

Graddol, Leith, and Swann (1996) note that throughout history, English has undergone substantial semantic change, often occurring without speakers' conscious awareness – a phenomenon referred to as "change from above." As Wenz (2013) highlights, such changes in meaning are frequently driven by emerging trends. CMC itself facilitates the development of these trends, further catalyzing the production of the digital vocabulary.

In today's digital landscape, communication has become extraordinarily rapid and pervasive. With millions of users actively engaging on various social platforms, each with its unique interface and terminology, the conditions are ripe for the creation of new words. The layout and interactive features of these platforms often play a direct role in shaping the language used within them.

Jackson and Amvela (2000) observe that the meaning of a word is shaped by its relationship with other lexical items, including synonyms and antonyms. These relational networks influence how words adapt and acquire new meanings in different contexts. This adaptability is especially evident in online discourse, where meaning can shift rapidly in response to situational or cultural trends.

The diachronic nature of language change – its development over time – is evident in the historical influence of Latin on English semantics. Stehling (2014) and Küpper (2011) both affirm that meaning changes have been a regular part of English linguistic history. Just as Latin once shaped English vocabulary and usage, CMC now exerts a similar influence, reshaping how words are understood and used.

Fischer (1998) introduces the concept of nonce formations, or words created spontaneously by speakers or writers to fulfill immediate communicative needs. This is particularly relevant in the

context of online interactions, where rapid exchanges often prompt users to coin new expressions. Such lexical creativity has become a hallmark of digital discourse, reflecting not only the evolving nature of language but also the inventive spirit of its users.

Methodology

This is qualitative and descriptive research. In this study, the researchers have delimited the study to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Telegram in order to collect frequently used digital terms. The data was collected from these four websites and is presented in shape of various words and their old and new meanings. Selected neologisms on these social media are also displayed in data analysis to show that the online use of these neologisms has great escalation. These neologisms are used everywhere in spoken and written forms. We find the use of these terms in newspapers and TV News as well. Purposive sampling method is used to select these social media websites. These websites may be considered representatives of rest of all the social media networks because they are ubiquitous in Uzbekistan. Most of the online community in Uzbekistan is expected to be active member of these websites. On a small-scale study, the main pages/home pages of these social media networks were selected which are replete with digital terms. Some on these are entirely new words, some are blends but most of them are old words used in entirely new sense. Hence this study focuses on the digital terms used on three dominant social media networks.

Results and Discussions

Examples of Digital terms from Facebook

Word	Old Usage	New Usage
Like	To enjoy or prefer something.	A quick form of engagement to show approval or agreement with content.
Tag	A label for identification, often on physical items.	To link a person's profile to a photo or post.
Share	To give part of something to others.	To repost or forward content to other users or your timeline.
Wall	A vertical structure enclosing a space.	A user's public profile page showing shared content.
Check In	To register one's arrival at a location.	To announce your location on Facebook using a GPS-based feature.
Story	A narrative or account of events.	A short-term, disappearing photo/video post (24 hours).
Follow	To go after someone or something.	To subscribe to a person's public updates or posts.
Post	To send a letter or to publicly display a notice.	To upload or share a message, image, or video on a timeline.
Profile	A written description or outline of someone's background.	A user's Facebook page showing their personal information and activities.
DP (Display Picture)	N/A – abbreviation from internet culture.	A user's profile photo visible to others.
Cover	Something that protects or hides.	A large header image on top of a user's profile.

Status	Position or condition of a person or thing.	A short post or message shared to express one's current thoughts, mood, or activity.
--------	---	--

Examples of Digital terms from Instagram

Word	Old Usage	New Usage
Reel	A cylinder for winding (e.g., film reel).	A short-form video format used for entertainment, marketing, or trends, similar to TikTok.
Filter	A device that removes unwanted substances.	Visual effects applied to photos or videos to enhance or alter appearance.
Like	To enjoy or have a favorable opinion.	A symbolic gesture (tap/click) to show approval of a post or comment
Follow	To go after someone physically or pay attention.	To subscribe to someone's updates.
Profile	A brief description or outline.	A personal account page showing user information.
Post	To send mail or publish publicly.	To upload content like photos, videos, or captions.
Story	A narrative, either fictional or factual.	A temporary post visible for 24 hours.
Note	A brief written message or record.	A short message or update shared in DMs or profile.
Share	To divide and give part of something.	To repost or distribute digital content with others.
Boomerang	A curved tool that returns when thrown.	A short looping video clip.
Layout	Arrangement in design or space.	Template for arranging photos in a collage or Instagram post.
Live	To be alive or occur in real-time.	Real-time video broadcasting.
GIF	A file format (Graphics Interchange Format) for images.	Short, looping animated images often used to express reactions or emotions.
GIPHY Stickers	N/A – neologism.	Animated stickers sourced from GIPHY to be used in Stories or messages.
Restrict	To limit or confine.	To discreetly limit someone's interactions with your account without blocking them.
Nickname	A familiar or humorous name for a person.	A custom name you can assign to someone in DMs.

Group Chat	Group and chat existed separately.	A shared messaging space where multiple users can communicate together.
IGTV	N/A – coined term.	A platform within Instagram for posting long-form videos (now discontinued).
Request	To ask for something politely.	A notification when someone wants to follow or message you, awaiting your approval.
Feed	To give food; in computing, a stream of data.	Main screen showing posts and updates from accounts you follow
Account	A record of financial transactions; a personal report or explanation.	A registered user profile on a digital platform.
Crossposting	Not used traditionally. formed from “cross” and “posting.”	Sharing the same content across multiple platforms. platforms (e.g., Instagram and Facebook).
Mention	To refer to someone or something briefly in speech or writing.	To tag someone using ‘@’ in a post or comment.
Highlight	To emphasize something.	A saved Story collection shown on a user’s profile.
Comment	A spoken or written remark expressing an opinion.	A typed message under a post or video as a reaction or thought

Examples of Digital terms from YouTube

Word	Old Usage	New Usage
Playlist	A list of songs arranged for play on the radio or music players.	A custom collection of YouTube videos grouped by the user or algorithm.
Shorts	Short pants or abbreviated items.	Very short-form video content on YouTube (like Reels or TikToks).
Livestream	Not used historically as one word.	Real-time broadcasting of video content over the internet.
Notification Bell	A bell is a ringing device; in school or church, it signals events	Icon to manage alerts for new video uploads or updates from channels.
Subscribe	To sign up for a publication.	To follow a YouTube channel and receive updates.
Unsubscribe	To cancel a subscription.	To stop following a YouTube channel.
Channel	Path for water, TV station.	User’s video content page.
Badge	A symbol of achievement, rank, or membership (e.g., police badge).	A visual marker next to usernames (e.g., for members, super fans, or moderators).

Purchase	To buy something.	Buying digital items like movies, memberships, or super chats on YouTube.
Incognito	Concealed identity or disguise.	A browser mode that hides viewing history.
Cast	To throw something; in media, to assign roles or broadcast	To stream content from one device to another (e.g., from phone to TV).
Playback	The act of replaying recorded audio or video.	The control and quality of playing videos on YouTube (e.g., speed, resolution).
Ambient Mode	“Ambient” means surrounding atmosphere	A feature that blends video colors into the screen background to enhance visual comfort.
VR (Virtual Reality)	A newer term, historically theoretical; refers to computer-simulated environments	Immersive 360° video experiences on YouTube compatible with VR headsets.

Examples of Digital terms from Telegram

Word	Old Usage	New Usage
Account	A record of financial transactions or personal reports	A registered Telegram profile linked to a phone number.
Profile	A short description of a person, often in writing	A user’s basic public information (photo, name, bio) in Telegram.
Status	Social or professional position.	User’s activity info (e.g., online, last seen).
Chat	Informal spoken conversation.	Text-based communication between Telegram users.
Star	Celestial body or celebrity symbol.	Icon used for favoriting or highlighting messages.
Theme	Main idea or topic of a piece of art or literature.	Visual appearance or style (color, background) of the Telegram interface.
Username	Not used before internet.	Unique ID that allows others to find and message you on Telegram without a phone number.
Bio	Short form of "biography" – life description.	A short text on a Telegram profile to describe the user.
Gift	Voluntary present.	Virtual items sent to others.
GIF	Image file format.	Animated images for fun or emotion.
Emoji	N/A – Japanese mobile term.	Icons to express emotions.
Channel	Route or TV station.	Broadcast platform for Telegram users.
Subscriber	Payer for regular services.	Follower of a Telegram channel (usually free).

Request	Formal asking.	Message or action to initiate communication or join groups.
User	One who uses a service.	A registered participant in the Telegram platform.
Admin	Organization management.	Group or channel managers with control rights (add/remove users, delete posts).
Owner	One who possesses.	The creator of a group or channel with the highest level of control.
Post	To send or announce publicly.	A message shared in a Telegram channel or group.
Reaction	A response to a stimulus or situation	Emoji or sticker response to a message (like "like," "love," etc.).
Statistics	Numerical data analysis.	Data showing user activity, post reach, engagement in Telegram channels/groups.
Logo	A graphic symbol representing a brand or company	Still the same, but often applied to digital brand identities, like Telegram itself.
Affiliate Program	Business model for partnership commissions.	Telegram or related services offering rewards for inviting others or promoting.
Broadcast	Transmit via radio/TV.	Sending messages to a large audience via Telegram channels.

The results of this study clearly illustrate that social media platforms are fertile grounds for rapid semantic transformation. Words such as "like," "follow," "story," and "post" have acquired meanings that deviate significantly from their original uses. These changes are not random but rather systematic, driven by the design of digital platforms, the interactive nature of online communication, and the users' creative adaptation to technological environments.

A notable trend is the recontextualization of familiar vocabulary to fit new communicative functions. This phenomenon is amplified by the visual and symbolic features of CMC, where brevity and visual cues (e.g., icons, emojis, GIFs) are preferred for faster and more effective interaction. For instance, terms like "reaction," "status," or "share" now carry distinct meanings in the digital sphere, emphasizing engagement and identity construction rather than their traditional connotations.

This trend suggests that semantic change in the digital age is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a sociocultural one. It represents how language responds to shifting modes of interaction, technological design, and user agency. The evolution of digital vocabulary illustrates the active role of speakers in shaping and negotiating meaning, reinforcing the idea that language is a living, user-driven system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the digital era has catalyzed a profound shift in the way language is used, shaped, and understood. Social media and other forms of computer-mediated communication serve as dynamic ecosystems where linguistic change is not only possible but inevitable. The study reveals that traditional vocabulary items have been redefined, repurposed, or extended in meaning to align with the communicative demands of digital interaction.

The findings underscore that semantic change is closely tied to technological innovation, user behavior, and social context. As users continually interact in digital spaces, they become active participants in the evolution of language, contributing to the development of new linguistic norms and practices. These changes reflect a broader transformation in human communication – one that prioritizes immediacy, interactivity, and adaptability.

Furthermore, the globalization of digital media ensures that English-based digital terms increasingly influence other languages, promoting lexical borrowing, hybridization, and semantic convergence across cultures. Understanding these trends is essential not only for linguists but also for educators, content creators, and digital platform designers aiming to navigate and leverage the evolving language of the internet.

Ultimately, this research affirms the central role of semantic change in digital linguistics and highlights the need for continued exploration of how language adapts in the face of technological and cultural shifts.

References:

1. Algeo, J. (1993). *Fifty Years Among the New Words: A Dictionary of Neologisms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
2. Crystal, D. (2005). *How Language Works*. USA: Penguin Books Limited.
3. Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the internet* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4. Fischer, R. (1998). *Lexical Change in Present-day English: A Corpus-based Study of the Motivation, Institutionalization, and Productivity of Creative Neologisms*. Italy: Gunter Narr Verlag.
5. Fowler, H. (1983). *Modern English Usage*. London: Oxford Publications.
6. Graddol, D., Leith, D., & Swann, J. (1996). *English: History, Diversity, and Change*. London: Psychology Press.
7. Jackson, H., & Amvela, E. Z. (2000). *Words, Meaning and Vocabulary: An Introduction to Modern English Lexicology*. UK: A & C Black.
8. Katamba, F. (2005). *English Words*. USA: Routledge Publishers.
9. Küpper, T. (2011). *Neologism in Early Modern English*. Cologne: GRIN Publishing.
10. Lyons, J. (1995). *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
11. McCarthy, M., & Dell, F. O. (1994). *English Vocabulary in Use*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
12. Malec, W., & Rusinek, M. (2015). *Within Language, Beyond Theories: Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and Corpus-based Studies*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing; 1st Unabridged edition.
13. Pranjić, I. (2016). *Online Neologisms: The Study of Word-formation Processes*. I. Pranjić.
14. Stehling, D. (2014). *Semantic Change in the Early Modern English Period: Latin Influences on the English Language*. Jena: Anchor Academic Publishing.
15. Stekauer, Pavol. (2002). *On the Theory of Neologisms and Nonce-formations*.
16. Stern, G. (1975). *Meaning and Change of Meaning: With Special Reference to the English Language*. USA: Greenwood Press.
17. Thorne, S. L., & State, P. (2003). *Review of Language and The Internet*. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24-27.
18. Wenz, F. (2013). *An Insight on Semantic Change*. GRIN Verlag