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Neologisms and polysemy in social media: A morpho-semantic analysis

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims at investigating the effect of using social networks onto the language of users in terms of word meanings and forms. It looks into the role of social media in improving or worsening the linguistic performance of users. The thesis deals with up-to-date data in order to be examined from a morpho-semantic perspective. The sample of the study consists of random users of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and other applications that people usually use to communicate. Findings of the study indicate that social media and communication applications often determine the users' choices of words and vocabulary. Hence, this thesis offers a closer look at the morpho-semantic characteristics of the language of social media through analyzing vivid examples of daily posts on social media. Moreover, the spelling of words is also influenced by social networks, as they encourage people to communicate with the least possible letters or symbols used.

**Keywords** *social media, morphological productivity, neologisms, semantic change, orthography*

## Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Objectives of the Study.....	2
1.2 Significance of the Study.....	2
1.3 Thesis Hypothesis.....	3
1.4 Key Questions.....	3
1.5 Limitations.....	4
1.6 Data Collection.....	4
1.7. Chapterization.....	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.1 Definition of Key Terms.....	7
2.2 Social Media and Orthography.....	8
2.3 The Effect of Social Media on Words and Meaning.....	9
2.4 The Relationship Between Semantics and Morphology.....	13
2.5 Neologisms and Polysemy.....	14
2.5.1 Neologisms.....	14

2.5.2 Polysemy.....	15
2.6 Related Studies.....	17
2.7 Theoretical Framework.....	20
III. Morphological Analysis of Social Media Language.....	26
3.1 Social media and Morphological Productivity.....	26
3.1.1 Morphological Productivity.....	26
3.1.2 Aspects of Morphological Productivity in Social Media.....	27
3.1.3 Rule Bending Creativity in Social Media.....	27
A. Deletion or Omission as an Aspect of Morphological Productivity...	29
3.1.4 Semi- Productivity.....	32
3.2 Word Formation Processes and Social Media Neologisms.....	33
3.2.1 Linguistic and Extra Linguistic Sources for the Invention of Neologisms..	35
3.2.2 WFP of Social Media Neologisms.....	36
A. Abbreviations.....	37
i. Acronyms.....	39
ii. Clipping.....	40
iii. Blending.....	41
B. Borrowing or Loan Words.....	45
C. Conversion.....	47
D. Coinage.....	47
E. Old Words with New Meanings.....	48
F. Derivation or Affixation.....	49
G. Compounding.....	51
3.3 The Impact of Social Media on Orthography.....	53

IV.	Semantic Analysis of Social Media Language.....	56
4.1	Neologisms: The Appearance of New Diction in Language.....	56
4.1.1	History of Neologisms in Semantics.....	56
4.1.2	Neologisms in Social Media Terminology.....	59
4.2	Semantic Analysis of Neologisms of SM.....	61
4.2.1	Lexical Semantic Analysis.....	61
4.2.2	Compositional Semantic Analysis.....	65
4.2.3	Content Based Semantic Analysis.....	67
4.3	Two Dimensional Semantics in Social Media Context.....	71
4.4	Polysemy in Social Media.....	73
4.5	The Meillet Model for Semantic Change.....	77
4.6	Conclusion.....	84
V.	Findings and Conclusions.....	85
5.1	Findings related to the morphological analysis of social media.....	85
5.2	Findings related to semantic change.....	86
5.3	Conclusion.....	87
5.4	Suggestions for Further Research.....	89

REFERENCES.....90

APPENDICES.....

    APPENDIX A: Language of Social Media Questionnaire.....104

    APPENDIX B: A Sample of Random Tweets, Facebook Posts, Instagram  
Captions.....106

## List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Some Examples of Social Media Neologisms with their definition.....	15
2. –en blocking takes place due to phonological constraints.....	30
3. Comparison Between Three Productive Affixes ( <i>ist/id/ er</i> ).....	31
4. A List of Some Commonly Used Neologisms Classified According to Form Class...	34
5. A List of Abbreviations that are Commonly Trending in Social Networks among Users.....	37
6. A List of Blending Words in Social Media.....	41
7. English Words that are borrowed by Arab users on Twitter.....	44
8. Examples of Social Media Derivational Neologisms.....	46
9. A List of Social Media Compound Neologisms.....	49
10. Newmark’s Twelve types of neologisms.....	51
11. Lexical and Contextual Meaning of Some Social Media Neologisms.....	60
12. Compositional Semantic Analysis of common social media phrases through different approaches.....	61
13. Frequency of Occurrence of Word- Formation Processes of Social Media Neologisms.....	66

## List of Figures

Figure	Page
1. Figure 1. <i>Screenshot of an example of blending</i>	
2. Screenshot of an Example of Blending with Overlapping.....	
3. Screenshot of the Use of #ByeFelicia Hashtag.....	67
4. Screenshot of Polysemy Example.....	75
5. Screenshot of a Facebook Homepage.....	82
6. Screenshot of a Tweet with the “influencer” Used.....	83
7. A Screenshot for the use of “Brand Advocate” .....	84
8. The number of Occurrence of Word Formation Processes .....	89
9. Percentage of Word Formation Processes.....	89

## **List of Abbreviations**

DM: Direct Message

FB: Facebook

SM: Social Media

SNS: Social Network Sites

RT: Retweet

WFP: Word Formation Process

## **Chapter I. Introduction and Overview**

Language has a communicative function and people use different forms of language to express themselves either written or verbally. Through the past decade, people have created new ways of communication such as texting, sending emails and posting on social media applications and websites. In other words, a new era in socializing has started with the advancement of telecommunication and technology. As a result, the language used mostly by the new generations has dramatically changed due to the new methods of communication that force people to economize while using language. For instance, Twitter is one of the most popular and mostly used social media applications that allows users to write 140 letters as a tweet. The fact that most users of social networks are young is reflected in the way they use the language. Indeed, new words and vocabulary have appeared in their dictionary. Moreover, they may misspell or abbreviate words in order to write within the letters limit that they are allowed to use. This research tackles the phenomenon of how social media affects the diction and orthography of users from both a morphological and semantic perspectives.

This study focuses on the common words and terms that are commonly used and become widely-spread due to social media applications. Polysemy and neologisms of social media reflect how language can develop through time, especially because of technology. According to Mworira (2015), “language evolves in technology based on the use of this language and the neologisms formed in social networking online. Growth in SNSs has transformed the way in which people create and share or exchange information and ideas which has been accelerated through virtual networking sites” (p.1). As a matter of fact, social media has become a prominent medium of

interaction for different purposes. For example, some sellers or companies market their product or services on social media platforms. New mothers form and join Facebook groups to support each other and post their inquiries for quick answers and support. Hence, socializing through social media is fast, interactive and detailed. This makes users heavily depend on it to take the essence of what it offers.

Finally, the topic of neologisms and social media language is dealt in regard to morphological, semantic scopes/ domains.

### **1.1 Objectives of the thesis**

The thesis has these objectives:

1. To explore the extent to which language users are semantically influenced by social media usage.
2. To investigate the reasons for new words and spelling errors that are found in users' daily production on social media and real life.
3. to figure out the characteristics of netspeak neologisms and their patterns of formation.
4. To describe the lexical features and neologisms that can be found in the linguistic productions of language users who post on social media on a daily basis.
5. To examine the factors that influence the production and usage of neologisms and netspeak.

### **1.2 Significance of the thesis**

The motivation for this thesis lies in the observation that, despite the growing significance of social media as a subject of academic interest, only few linguists have investigated how

language is used and involved in social media in morphosemantic terms. Moreover, the influence of social media upon lexical competence and performance has not been tackled yet. The social function of language and the way technology manipulates the human brain encourage the researcher to study more about how the vocabulary and spelling of users from different age groups and backgrounds are influenced by social media usage.

### **1.3 Thesis hypotheses**

- Social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Tumblr<sup>1</sup> influence both forms and meanings of words.
- Social media neologisms deviate from the use of Standard English.
- Users of social media are semantically rich due to the rapidly growing online communicative activities.

### **1.4 Key research questions**

1. How does social media change the diction and orthography of today's language?
2. Does social media introduce new words to users?
3. Do words imply different meanings in different social media contexts?
4. Does social media enhance the use of polysemy?
5. What are Neologisms?
6. What factors influence the production and usage of neologism in social media?
7. What are the most productive morphological processes in today's social media neologisms?

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<sup>1</sup> Tumblr: a microblogging platform that is owned by Yahoo and allows users to post multimedia and content to a short-form blog.