NEOLOGISMS IN ENGLISH AS A REFLECTION OF #BLACKLIVESMATTER MOVEMENT

Summary. The article looks at the issue of new word coinage through the prism of hashtag activism, namely the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The authors see hashtag activism as a prolific source for neologisms in the English language, which is accounted for by the nature of the emergence of new linguistic units as well as the medium for their popularization. The article offers extensive analysis of a number of ways how new lexical units are coined in #BlackLivesMatter related discourse. Semantic extension is seen as a way of widening the existing meaning of lexical units belonging to BLM discourse. Such ways on new word coinage as blending and abbreviations are analyzed in the diachronic aspect, with the research into their origins and current use. Hashtagging as a means of neologism coinage is also dwelt on as a modern way employed by the Internet-based platforms. The nature of temporary neologisms is studied in relevant contexts.

Keywords: discourse, pragmatics, lexicology, neologism, hashtag activism, #blacklivesmatter.

НЕОЛОГІЗМИ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ ЯК ВІДОБРАЖЕННЯ РУХУ #BLACKLIVESMATTER

Анотація. Стаття пропонує аналіз шляхів появи нового словника англійської мови в світлі гештег активізму, а саме #BlackLivesMatter, який виник у Сполучених Штатах та агodem лазав всесвітньою популярністю. Гештег активізм розглядається з точки зору різних аспектів: як стимул для активних дій, спрямованих на соціальні зміни в суспільстві; як позиційна висловлювальна потенційна; як начиння стимуляції для обговорення теми рівності та соціальної справедливості у навчальному середовищі. Такі підходи до розгляду хештегу #BlackLivesMatter розширюють рамки лінгвістичного дискурс-аналізу, демонструючи багатоаспектність даного явища. Незважаючи на велику кількість наукових праць, присвячених розгляду #BlackLivesMatter, бракує лінгвістичного, наукового підходу до аналізу нових мовних одиниць, пов’язаних з даним активістським рухом. Завдяки Інтернет-платформам, таким як Твітер, Інстаграм, Фейсбук тощо, поширення нової лексики, що належить до дискурсу гештег активізму, а саме #BlackLivesMatter, відбувається стрімкими темпами та потребує детального розгляду. Серед популярних шляхів словотвору, яким гештег дав поштовх до розвитку, є розширення семантики існуючих лексичних одиниць. Іншим варіантом є телескопія, як спосіб поєднання семантики двох лексичних одиниць в одне ціле, що значно розширює початкову семантику окремих лексем.

Ключові слова: дискурс, прагматика, лексикологія, неологізм, гештег активізм, #blacklivesmatter.

© Dmytruk Olga, Lysenko Kateryna, 2021
the tweet context. Also, he made the distinction between the hashtags based on their structural qualities distinguishing two types. The first one comprises the hashtags that are syntactically embedded in the structure of a post and the second is extra-sentential.

It is clear that hashtag has moved beyond the realm of online media and is getting its place as a linguistic unit offline, too. That is why it may be suggested that hashtagging can be viewed as a new source of the sophisticated morphological mechanism of word coinage, which generates the item with peculiar qualities that distinguish it from any other lexical categories. Consequently, it should be treated differently as a separate linguistic unit (Zappavigna, 2011).

Hashtag activism has been the focus of various research in linguistic and social spheres, as the subject is multifaceted, giving rise to a number of scientific speculations. G. Yang (2016) looks at hashtag activism of #BlackLivesMatter from the point of view of its narrative agency claiming that it is communal, invented, skilled, and protean. P. Cumberbatch & N. Trujillo-Pagán (2016) identify #BlackLivesMatter as an important part of the classroom curriculum. They see the phenomenon as part of the global discussions on race and social justice and claim that teaching students about the issue will raise their awareness of the matter and their own rights. S. Jackson (2016) dwells on the issue of Black feminism in connection with hashtag activism. S.-S. Duvall & N. Heckemeyer (2018) discuss black celebrity hashtag activism from the standpoint of the discursive formation of a social movement. They maintain that #BlackLivesMatter movement is different from the previously existing forms of hashtag activism because it seeks to change power structures within society.

More recent works concentrate on some negative aspects of hashtag activism, e.g. so-called slacktivism, brought up by J. Roberts (2021), which may be compared to armchair activism in the context of counterproductive activities, such as online discussions, retweets, and likes. A. McClanahan (2021) highlight the downfalls of performative allyship on social media, some of which include the spreading of misinformation or limited engagement, as the he collection and analysis of closed- and open-ended survey questions showed.

Unsolved parts of the general problem.

New words related to #BlackLivesMatter movement have been analyzed sporadically due to the emerging nature of the given linguistic units. Language and the changes occurring within its vocabulary corpus in particular provide prolific insights on community development and #BLM movement as a topical and powerful phenomenon taking place today is seen as a rich source of neologisms. Besides, as the process of vocabulary extension and the community progression are both ongoing ones, the value of the research in this field is pivotal, as each work in the field becomes a building block for the arborization of lexicology as a linguistic branch.

The aim of the article is the analysis of the #BLM related neologisms and their function within social discourse, intertwining and systematization of the investigations on the topic as well as observation of the repercussion of the Internet impact on the language and its development. It is mediat-ed through the analysis of the #BLM related discourse, with a specific emphasis on the large-scale usage-based investigation of the coinage process in the online-mediated communication.

The main part. Although here is a rich tradition of linguistic investigations searching for a common definition of the term neologism, it is considered to be self-explanatory. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the neologism is a new word, usage, or expression (Merriam-Webster dictionary). The entry on neologisms in the Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics focuses on the ways how new words are coined (Lehrer, 2006).

The study of neologism occurrence and their meaning is important because the appearance of newly coined words in the past as well as shifts in their initial meaning may reveal as much about the present as neologisms coined today may give us insights about the past (Simpson, 2007). With this in mind we shall overview the evolution of meaning and interpretation of neologisms related to BLM movement.

The definitions of black+accent as neologism means is columbusing (Simpson, 2007). Another linguistic item belonging to this group is second-amendment, which is a semantic extension of the noun group Sec ond Amendment referring to the American Constitution, where the rights of the citizens to bear arms is stipulated. It is registered as a verb in the meaning of to kill (someone) with a gun, used ironically by gun control supporters (Flood, 2017).

Another illustrative case is the usage of the word woke, whose meaning has undergone significant changes since the 40s. The neologism woke was derived from the African American vernacular English from the phrase stay woke, whose grammatical aspect emphasizes the ongoing process. In 1942, in the first volume of Negro Digest, J. Saunders Redding used the past participle of the verb wake in his article dedicated to the labor unions. Twenty years later, woke appeared again, in a 1962 New York Times article If You're Woke You Dig It: No mickey mouse can be expected to follow today's Negro idiom without a hip assist. The pragmatic aspect of woke had a strong association with Black Americans and their fight for justice. Even Martin Luther King makes allusion to this connotation in his speech “Remaining Awake Through the Great Revolution”. Among the neologisms created by means of blending related to the topic in question coined by the virtual community we have come across a number of lexical units, e.g. blaccent (the definition by Urban Dictionary) — blending of black+accent, a distinctive manner by speech, pitch or tone particular to African American urban inner city youth, which due to the recent events got strong derogatory, racist connotation: “I treat Awkwafina the same way I treat Miley Cyrus: I’m glad you’ve come into your own and did whatever soul searching you needed to do, but I remember your ‘Blaccent’ days and how quickly you
Discarded it when it wasn’t serving you,” tweeted @ BrandonLBradfor (Twitter, 2021). Among other examples are such neologisms as linguicism (lingual+racism) – discrimination based on language: #BlackASL is more than what’s signed by a brown skinned person. And it’s also severely understudied like anything related to black deaf people. Why is that so?

Answer: racism, ableism, and linguicism (Twitter, 2020), racenality (race+ethnicity), coined by Popi Leistyna, 1999 (Stepanyan, 2019), CABlinasian (a term Tiger Woods made up to define his multiethnicity, the merger of Caucasian+Black+American+Indian+Asian): Rooting for Tiger can be controversial – particularly among Blacks, who felt betrayed by his long-ago declaration that he is not Black but Cablinasian (Twitter, 2020), Chicican@ (product of affixation considering @ to be a newly affix) – word-reference to Mexican-Americans: Chicican@: Muralism: Agency and Identity (Blair, 2020).

As the issue of race is pivotal in BLM movement, the campaign #SayHerName was launched in 2014, focusing on the black women’s rights. This idea was succinctly embodied into the word misogyny+noir (misogyny+noir (the French for black)). It first appeared on the Internet coined by Moia Bailey to describe “the specific hatred, dislike, distrust, and prejudice directed toward Black women” (Asare, 2020): Noname was criticizing how Beyoncé was giving back and now she is getting the same for her library. Maybe she will finally understand not to taint people’s intentions and assume the worst of them. The same misogyny your subjected Beyoncé to is turning on you (Twitter, 2021).

Apart from the aforementioned examples, which have been already authorized by the language community regarding the fact that media sources actively utilize them, too, other neologisms related to the issue still provoke active discussions of the Internet users. For instance, one of the platforms held the debate on the suitable word for the notion “seeing racial issues or racism in everything, or imputing racial issues or racism onto everything”, which ended up with a few newly coined word suggestions such as panracialism, racianoid and tumblique suggested by the users (“Neologism for ‘Seeing Racism Everywhere / Imputing Racism Onto Everything’, 2016).

Moreover, in a special category apart from #blacklivesmatter the hashtag or rather as it was registered in the dictionary a newly coined word #icantbreathe (reference to the final words of Eric Garner, turned into rallies cry against police violence) got its credit as the most notable in 2014 (Flood, 2017): Remember this? Remember how, in 2020, a black man said this as his final words? You could try to push it away, but there is no stopping the truth. #BlackLivesMatter and if they can’t breathe, then I can’t breathe, and nor can a lot of other Americans. #WeCan’tBreathe #ICantBreathe (2021, Twitter).

Regarding the aforementioned examples it is to be outlined that the neologisms coined in social media usually have simple structure to be easily recognized by the speakers (not only Americans, but the global English-speaking community, too). Though the classification of the online coined words is still vague (due to the debatable new process of word coinage hashtagging with # and @ used as affixes), for the sake of convenience we shall outline the following prevailing word building patterns: composition, authors’ neologisms and semantic extension. As BLM is a social protest movement the neologisms tend to have “liquid” definitions implying that being used in different communicative situations they not only convey the original semantics value, but get new personal perception and interpretation in a given pragmatic context, so that the more it is used, the harder it is to give a concise definition of the word in question.

To sum up, it is to notice that word coinage in social media, i.e. online, does not always fall into any already established pattern of word coinage, which nourishes observations about the language development and the functioning of the online community as the system, which in the process of producing utterances naturally stumbles upon the lack of needed lexeme in their vocabulary and instead of trying to find another way of conveying a message coins new linguistic items.

The neologism #blacklivesmatter became the word of the year in America in 2014. While it does not meet the traditional definition of word, it became an illustrative case when the hashtag was seen as a succinct and effective way to convey a social message, thus was recognized and popularized by the speakers (Flood, 2017). Observing the Black Lives Matter discourse, we have come across 3 regular variants of its spelling, namely Black Lives Matter as 3 separate words each beginning with a capital letter, #BlackLivesMatter or #blacklivesmatter spelled as a hashtag in all possible combinations outside social networks and BLM spelled as an acronym. It is important to outline that although all the variants appear both online and offline, in published press and internet media there are some peculiar patterns of usage of this or that spelling, proving that the form of the word transforms the way we perceive the transmitted idea.

It can be observed that the media resources certainly tend to use the standard spelling Black Lives Matter as our perception surmises it as more sober, influential and consequently makes the reader perceive the message with robust attention to the content of the articles. For instance, the media platforms with major industry accreditation such as BBC, DW, The New Yorker, The Times prefer this “standard” spelling. A study aimed at figuring out whether political hashtags in the headlines make any difference to the perception of the content by readers proved that people were more biased, considered the topic to be less important and were less eager to make further research on the topic when hashtag in the headline was used (Rho, 2019).

It is important to outline that analyzing the date when the article or post was published matters not less. At the beginning of the movement in 2013 no abbreviation or shortened spelling were in use as the idea only began to spread in society, thus, few people were familiar with what BLM could refer to. After it began to delve into mass media and pervade all social platforms, the abbreviation got its credit and even went offline appearing on the protesters’ signs. Besides, it is the nature of the initial platform Twitter where #BLM appeared, which contributed to the popularity of the shortened form as any tweet has a limited number of symbols which are allowed to be published.
BLM, spelled as an abbreviation, is a product of the **abbreviation** coinage process, which is a specific way of compression of a multi-word combination to the reduced form. The compression of semantic meaning asserts another approach to the way we encode and decipher the meaning. Thus, a new cognitive structure is formed, and the sign which mirrors this structure should contain the clues to the presentation way of the subject of a cognitive process. The process of this cognitive transaction is based on the code competence of the discourse participants or on the outlining of some parts of a real-life fragment, which become more meaningful, whereas this process is commonly defined as “schematization of the real life”. This is a building block of the communication process. Here the thinking becomes palpable, and here is where the word gets the power to construe reality, as abbreviations, being a common code, make the process of transmission easier for the participants, allowing to save time and space, while simultaneously making you as a receiver a unique user of the secret code known only to the initiated. This creolization seems to be an unconscious primordial reason for utilizing the acronym/abbreviation apart from convenience (Kostina, Zerkin, Pesina, 2015, p. 707).

However, despite the natural anticipation that BLM could be easily deciphered, the debates go on whether it is appropriate to abbreviate BLM at all. Despite the natural expansion, which is expected in living language, when one is exposed to the shortened form and the rational utility of abbreviation culture in the process of information transmission, there is, however, a restricted scope of context, where it may be spelled as an abbreviation since BLM may also serve as a fuzzily applied label used to denominate all sorts of protest on racial inequality. So as an umbrella term it lacks the emotional connotation and one may run the risk that it would be used without a real engagement as to its implications, which dilutes the original aim of the movement. Thus, it is claimed that acronyms or abbreviations should not be used without a further extension as they risks enclosing connotatively driven biases, showing the lack of commitment or being used as a window-dressing (Shaleigha D’Clark, 2020).

By and large, the felicity of the **Black Lives Matter** as a linguistic unit is an illustrous example of how the unity of both the morphological and semantic meaning makes up a meaningful lexical unit. It demonstrates the “right headed” tendency of the English language, which in case of **Black Lives Matter** is perfectly illustrated: from the cover to the essence, from describing to acting, from an adjective to a verb.

It is worth mentioning that the **BLM** movement provoked a new interesting type of neologisms that can be defined as **temporary neologisms**. Certain communicative situations make the speaker produce an idea which is already “palpable”, i.e. accepted and understood within the community, and the speaker as a transmitter unconsciously comprises all the levels of its meaning. Thus, a neologism emerges, which performs its temporary communicative purpose and then normally comes out of fashion. Such neologisms exist in discourse (parole), but not in language (langue). Moreover, their meaning may be deciphered in a given communicative situation, but in another pragmatic situation they may appear meaningless. It may be shown by means of the **#8cantwait** neologism, which refers to eight police reforms that protesters believe could greatly reduce police brutality and number 12 with specific situational meaning standing for law enforcement or the police (Woodyard, 2020). As Tom Dalzell (2020, as cited in Woodyard), the author of several popular books on slang, justly admits: “I don’t think anyone is sitting around saying, ‘#8cantwait’”. In his works he also clarifies that only time will tell whether they will be ingrained in the vocabulary or just be washed away.

Movements like **BLM** are bound to have network structure, that implies that the newly coined word can be quicker legitimized and accepted within the speaking community. Though we cannot observe the temporary neologisms functioning in real life, as they acquire meaning in certain pragmatic context, some peculiar slang words, which prove the aforementioned statement, are to be mentioned. While some of them like **BLM** need no explanation, for they have acquired specific status over the others related to the movement words, other terms are more confusing as most of them have the form, which does not give clues to the meaning, if you are not “moving along with the movement”. It implies that a new word becomes contagious within a certain group of speakers, and apart from conveying important idea it simultaneously becomes viral, as those unfamiliar with the term are anxious to figure out the meaning, which allows the newly coined lexeme to stick in the vocabulary. Moreover, we see that all of them have a tendency to have contracted easy-to-swallow form, which again proves that the sphere of deployment (online media and social platforms) determines the choice of the form.

For instance, one of the neologisms belonging to this group is the aforementioned lexeme **#8cantwait**. Supposing it is composition which involves the merger of the 2 words: modal verb+verb, preceded by the number which is not a word, but carries important semantic value, it falls into the coinage category blending. But maybe we can state that it is a full lexicalized phrase, which functions as a linguistic unity and despite the fact that at first glance it does not resemble a constituent, maybe it is just another form, a digital one. Often with a hashtag added to the front, it now functions as an emblem to the campaign **#8cantwait** which aims at bringing the legislation change regarding the police abuse of their responsibilities. Regarding this context, we should also mention the abbreviation **ACAB**, which acquired its form and meaning in the street, which can be deciphered according to the Urban Dictionary as **All Cops Are Bastards**.

The pragmatic function is crucial when we investigate temporary neologisms. For instance, number 12 has also got another situational meaning denoting law enforcement or the police. As Tom Dalzell (cited by Woodyard, 2020) argues, there is no common explanation why 12 equals police, but it could be the Atlanta police code 10-12, which became the basis for the construction of meaning; it is often used in offensive statements, or when we imply that “there are people congregated where police (12) are going”. The aforementioned examples do prove the idea that temporary neologism can become a litmus test for the discourse partici-
pant, measuring the degree of their integrity in the movement as well as reveal interesting cognitive processes in the message decoding.

**Conclusion and suggestions for further research.** As a result of the systematization of the gathered information one has to emphasize that BLM is a pioneer in the way protest movements appear and function. The analysis has shown that newly coined lexical items tend to comply with the already existing paradigm of word formation patterns, namely: semantic extension (columbusizing, second amendment), blending (blaccient, misogynoir), abbreviation (BLM, ACAB).

However, its online origin provoked the emergence of a new form of the linguistic coverage with peculiar word formations as a result of its production: the hashtag phenomenon, which is viewed as a product of a new word formation mechanism called hashtagging (#icantbreathe, Chican@) and temporary neologisms, which exist in discourse and not in language having a situational meaning (12, #scantcount). It is to notice that the words, which are coined on the Internet, now find it easier to transpire into the vocabulary and their authorization of a speaking community comes quicker. Newly born form of the word coinage process such as hashtagging, where the full phrase is commonly lexicalized, and its impact on the generation process, allows one to suggest that the online presence of mankind is gradually pervading language functioning on all its layers raising a number of interesting points for further research.

On studying the BLM related coinages, we have seen how the human need for the conceptualization makes the speakers produce and absorb new linguistic items with an eagerness and speed never seen before. Behind the convoluted structure of a word one can observe a more complex mechanism of emergency where the society development serves as a mirror reflecting more complex patterns of human existence.

**References:**


