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# **English Neologisms in Modern Times**

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## **Abstract**

The study on neologisms or the new words created in a language has been gaining strength lately and has been getting the attention of linguists. It is obvious that neologisms produce a feeling of curiosity since they frequently appear in the vocabulary of speakers quite suddenly. For this reason, researchers have tried to explain how they are created and have also tried to classify them into different categories, even though they do not always coincide in their approach. While there is a general awareness of the meaning of neologisms that we use daily, researchers have investigated the reasons for their emergence, the preference that speakers show among competing forms of these new words and how they develop. The main aim of this paper is to understand neologisms in English and in the second place to discuss their role in the classroom of English as a foreign language briefly. In order to do so, based on previous research on the topic, I have classified neologisms into four main categories of neologisms: those that are newly coined terms, when the new word is a word that already exists in the language but with some changes in its form, when the new word has the same form but has undergone some non-formal changes, such as a change in its meaning or grammatical category, and finally when the new word has a foreign source (i.e. has been adopted from another language). Next, I will show that many modern neologisms have emerged in different areas as a consequence of a number of specific factors and circumstances such as the development of technology and science, new situations like Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, neologisms can also be found in news and advertising. I will propose that neologisms in these areas have spread quickly especially due to the Internet, websites and social media which have become the ideal channels for their spread. In the last part of this paper, I will discuss neologisms in EFL and I will argue that it is important to incorporate neologisms in the EFL lessons because they are part of the English culture and language and therefore EFL students should know them too.

**Keywords:** neologism, word-formation, new words, technology, advertising, news, Brexit, COVID-19, EFL teaching.

## **1. Introduction**

Languages are living entities which evolve over time and the lexicon plays a relevant role in this change because while words cease to be used other new words emerge. Neologisms are the new words that speakers create in a language. They serve to keep the language up-to-date since they generally emerge because of the new situations that need to be referred to, such as new technologies, new situations in politics and new developments. Speakers create and are exposed to neologisms everywhere, for instance, in the news, social media and advertising. Thus, the study of neologisms is of particular interest because they reflect the language that speakers use to talk about new realities and situations. It could be stated that almost all the words in a language were at some point a neologism.

This paper aims to discuss and analyse the presence of current neologisms in many scenarios of our daily life, with specific reference to English. In order to do so, the structure of the paper will be as follows. In section 2, I will first define the concept of neologism, then in section 3, I will explain how English neologisms are created. In section 4, I will discuss the main areas in which neologisms may be found currently, namely, the fields of technology, science, politics, COVID-19, advertising and the news. Finally, in section 5 I will discuss neologisms from the EFL perspective and I will address the issue of whether teaching neologisms is necessary for EFL students. Some guidelines to teach neologisms in the EFL will be provided.

## **2. Defining neologisms**

The word neologism comes from Greek “neo” (new) and “logos” (word). Hence, as its root suggests, a neologism is a new word that has recently been included in the vocabulary of a language (Pimat, 2016). Furthermore, it can also refer to an idiom and an expression that has been incorporated in the speakers’ everyday use of a language. Hence, “[n]eologisms are new words, word-combinations or fixed phrases that appear in the language due to the development of social life, culture, science and engineering” (Sayadi, 2011, para. 1). Neologisms are also defined “as newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense” (Newmark 1995, p. 140). It is estimated that languages gain 3,000 new words per year, although they are difficult to quantify exactly because some of them tend to arise and vanish rapidly (Newmark, 1995). It could be stated that almost all the words in a language were at some point a neologism, although

“most of these cease to be such through time and acceptance” and “opinions diverge on precisely how old a word must be to no longer be regarded a neologism” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 26).

Neologisms are opposed to archaisms, that is to say, the expressions that are not used by the standard user anymore or that have been forgotten. Even though archaisms are not commonly used anymore, they must still be present in the dictionary as they can be encountered in texts written centuries ago when these words were used (Segovia, 1859). By contrast, neologisms do not frequently appear in dictionaries. In fact, some lexicographers state that words and expressions can only be considered to be new if they do not appear “in general dictionaries of Standard English” (Bauer, 1983, as cited in Onyedum, 2012, p. 28). However, some dictionaries do include the speakers’ most widely used neologisms in their updated versions. This is the case of the supplement of the *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* which contains neologisms created via affixation (two-fifths of all the neologisms they have included), compounding (three fifths) and some instances of borrowings, conversion and back-formation (Ayto, 1995, as cited in Onyedum, 2012).

Generally speaking, when dictionary writers include new words in a dictionary they provide the date in which the neologism was first produced and an explanation about how it was created. When considering whether to include a new word or not, dictionary writers need to take into account the frequency of the neologism in a concrete period of time. The inclusion of neologisms in dictionaries allows speakers to be aware of the existence of these new words (Onyedum, 2012), after all, neologisms are part of many speakers’ everyday lexicon and their use is increasingly higher nowadays thanks to the media, language contact, the Internet and globalisation.

Some experts consider neologisms to be a sign of the normal evolution of language, while others believe that they are a demonstration of how new generations destroy the language. This controversy is reflected in two ways of thinking about language and language change: prescriptivism and descriptivism. On the one side, prescriptivism seeks to describe how languages work and are used (Milroy & Milroy, 1985). The advocates of this position believe in following the rules of a language strictly and do not tend to accept modifications in its use. Consequently, in the case of neologisms, “prescriptive dictionaries may either disregard the item completely or include it with labels such as

‘undesirable’, ‘unnecessary neologism’, etc. and propose what they consider more correct options, whereas descriptive dictionaries might simply record the borrowing alongside other native items” (Balteiro, 2011, p. 283).

Conversely, descriptivism:

does not tell you how you should speak; it describes your basic linguistic knowledge. It explains how it is possible for you to speak and understand, and it tells what you know about the sounds, words, phrases, and sentences of your language (Fromkin and Rodman, 1998, as cited in Bäckström, 2006, p. 2).

Descriptivists believe in respecting speakers’ intuitions and rules about the language so that new trends and changes are accepted as any other rule.

This controversy is also found among speakers who may adopt a different stance on the use of neologisms. For example, some speakers criticise the number of new terms that other people use. Indeed, neologisms — mainly acronyms and borrowings— are commonly associated with colloquial speech or with new ways to communicate such as text messaging, and are therefore not given importance. This controversy can also be seen when talking about technology, a very important area where neologisms are created, as there are “some who argue that the impact of technology has 'dumbed down' the language, [while] there are others who would claim that a language that does not evolve, is a dying language” (Abbas, 2009, p. 2).

### **3. The creation of neologisms in English**

The creation of English neologisms reflects English morphology and English morphological processes to a great extent (Behera & Mishra, 2013). In this section, I will discuss the processes which result in the creation of a neologism in English. Drawing from the classification by Behera and Mishra (2013), I have organised them into four main categories The creation of the new word from scratch, that is to say when a new form with a new meaning is created (section 3.1.), when the new word results from making some formal changes to a word that already exists in the language or is built from parts of it (section 3.2.), when the new word takes the same form as the original but has undergone changes to its meaning or grammatical category(section 3.3.), and finally when

the new word has a foreign source (i.e. has been adopted from another language or is a direct translation from another language) (section 3.4.).

### 3.1. New coinages

New coinages are words that have not been created under any word-formation process (Behera & Mishra, 2013) and which have been created with premeditation. New coinages do not arise very frequently since they “account for less than 1% of all English neologisms” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 28). Sometimes the new coinages are only used once and then disappear. These are the so-called nonce formations (Plotnik, 2008, as cited in Onyedum, 2012). The use of new coinages is common in advertising companies that need new words for their products —e.g. “Band-aid, Factoid, Google, Zipper” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 28). These words which are brand names are then frequently adopted to refer to everyday products. In other words, these names began to be written with an initial capital letter to indicate a brand name but after a while designate an item in a class or group and are written with an initial lower case letter (Onyedum, 2012).

### 3.2. Making formal changes to a word

Neologisms can also be created by changing the form of an already existing word, and this is the case of the five categories that I will discuss in this section: shortening, compounding, affixation/derivation, and reduplication.

#### 3.2.1. Shortening a word or words

The process of shortening a word or words to create new words includes shortening or clipping (3.2.1.1.), blending (3.2.1.2.), back-formation (3.2.1.3.), acronyms (3.2.1.4.), and abbreviations (3.2.1.5.).

##### 3.2.1.1. Shortening or clipping

Clipping is the word-formation process of shortening words and phrases that does not affect the meaning of the original word. Shortenings or clippings originate from words with two or three syllables and the grammatical function of the new word is the same.

Some instances of clipping are “advertisement – ad, telephone – phone, examination – exam, gasoline – gas, gymnasium – gym” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 30).

Behera and Mishra (2013) propose four main types of clippings depending on how words are reduced: back clipping, fore-clipping, middle clipping and complex clipping. Back clipping is the word-formation process in which the last part of the word is dropped — e.g. ‘gas’ from gasoline —, by contrast, in fore-clipping the first part of the word is dropped —e.g. ‘gator’ from ‘alligator’ —. In middle clipping —e.g. ‘flu’ from ‘influenza’ —the middle part of the word is maintained while the rest of the word is discarded. Finally, in complex clipping, various parts of different words are removed — e.g. ‘sitcom’ from ‘situation comedy’. Although generally speaking the shortened version of the word remains phonetically the same, there are some exceptions in which one of the phonemes is changed as in the case of ‘amp’ from ‘amphetamine’ in which the /f/ is substituted with the final /p/ or ‘manc’ from ‘Manchester’ in which the /tʃ/ is changed to /k/.

Borys (2018) examines clippings in English slang neologisms and he notes that these neologisms do not follow the main characteristics of clipping. Firstly, some of these neologisms do not always maintain the meaning that they had before the word was shortened. For example, the following slang clippings undergo a change in meaning: ‘collabo’, meaning an artistic collaboration, from ‘collaboration’; ‘newb’ from ‘newbie’, that is, a new internet user, is a recently introduced person into an internet discussion or a ‘multiplayer game’; and ‘noob’, whose meaning is a snowboarding beginner. In addition, some slang neologism clippings are not based on a word that exists in English, for example ‘clavaed up’ refers to ‘wearing a balaclava helmet’: ‘clava’ is taken from ‘bacalava’, the -ed suffix turns it into an adjective, and ‘up’ is added to emphasise the movement. Secondly, unlike standard clippings, some slang neologisms are based on monosyllabic words and they have a different grammatical function. For instance, the clipping ‘du’ comes from the monosyllabic ‘dude’ or ‘mo’ from ‘more’. Thirdly, although clippings normally result in words with one or two syllables, there are instances of neologisms of trisyllabic clippings such as ‘huntsabber’ from ‘hunt saboteur’. Fourthly, generally speaking, clippings are not created when they can stand for different words. However, there are some exceptions like the clipping ‘Van’ which can stand for (a city in Turkey), Vanadzor (a city in Armenia), Vancouver (a city in Canada; a city in the USA), Vantaa (a city in Finland), or Vanuatu (a republic in the Pacific) (CNPDSUE, 2008, as cited in Borys, 2018, p. 4).



Finally, clippings are essentially informal. That is to say, while the original form is used in formal or neutral contexts, the clipping word is used in informal occasions. When the original term is also an informal word, the clipping form is used as a taboo word such as ‘hoots’ from ‘hooters’ meaning ‘breasts’ or ‘towns’ from ‘town halls’ meaning ‘testicles’ (CNPDSUE, 2008, as cited in Borys, 2018, p. 6).

### 3.2.1.2. Blending

A blended word is a new word that takes the first part of one word and the last part of the other, as in ‘biopic’ (biographical and picture) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 30) or the neologism ‘rapefugee’, from ‘rape’ and ‘refugee’ (Würschinger et al., 2016). However, Mostafa (2013) argues that many neologisms that are blended words do not follow this pattern anymore. In order to provide evidence of these non-traditional blends, he examined websites such as *Word Spy*, *The Urban Dictionary* and the *Longman English Dictionary* which contain neologisms not usually included in the official Standard English dictionaries. He then analysed the roots, additions, use and acceptability of blends through the online source the Web Corp.

The author came across multiple trendy blends that do not comply with the traditional rules for the creation of blends. For instance, he presented two blends that had ‘friend’ as a component, namely, the noun ‘framily’ and the noun ‘frienemy’ or ‘frenemy’. The former, ‘framily’, is a combination of the nouns ‘family’ and ‘friend’, and refers to a friend that is considered a family member. However, this blend is unusual because the “r” belonging to ‘friend’ is inserted in the noun ‘family’ to put emphasis on the word. The latter, ‘frienemy/frenemy’, refers to a person who acts like a friend but in reality, is not. The “r” from ‘friend’ is inserted in the other component of the blend, in this case, ‘enemy’. More examples of atypical blends are variations of ‘internet’ blends: ‘netizen’ (the union of the last section of ‘internet’ and ‘citizen’), ‘netspeak’ (the fusion of the last part of ‘internet’ and the whole word ‘speak’), ‘netiquette’ and ‘netco’ (the union of the last segment of ‘internet’ and the first part of ‘company’) (Mostafa, 2013, pp. 148-150), all of which are neologisms.

Other interesting examples included by Mostafa (2013, pp. 150 - 152) are ‘wasband’ (formed with the verb ‘was’ and the last part of ‘husband’); ‘yestertech’ (formed with the first section of ‘yesterday’ and ‘technology’); ‘fluffraguette’ (‘fluff’ and the last part of

‘suffraguete’), ‘execubabble’ (the first part of ‘executive’ and ‘babble’); ‘execuspeak’ (from the first part of ‘executive’ and ‘speak’); ‘anecdota/ anecd-data’ (from the first part of ‘anecdotal’ and ‘data’). In addition, he mentions ‘robocall/robo-call’ (from ‘robot’ and ‘call’); ‘transgenic’ (from ‘transplantation’ and ‘genetical’); ‘textpectation’ (formed with the word ‘text’ and the last part of ‘expectation’); ‘vegangelical’ built with the words ‘vegan’ and ‘evangelical’; ‘thumbo’ (in which ‘thumb’ is attached to ‘typo’) and ‘flirtationship’ (that is the blending of ‘flirt’ and ‘relationship’).

*The Cambridge University Press Dictionary* in its latest edition of 2021 has included three more neologisms: ‘dunchfast’, ‘comfury’ and ‘cloffice’. ‘Dunchfast’ is a blend made with the union of the words ‘dinner’, ‘lunch’ and ‘breakfast’ and it refers to one single meal that combines dinner, lunch and breakfast. ‘Comfury’ is also a blend of the words ‘comfort’ and ‘luxury’ and it is a particular dressing style that combines feeling comfortable and being ready to go out. Finally, ‘cloffice’ is a blend of the words ‘closet’ and ‘office’ and it refers to a closed that has become an office.

### 3.2.1.3. Back-formation

This word-formation process also called ‘back derivation’ creates new words by dropping an actual or supposed derivational affix from the base of a word. Some examples of back-formation are “babysitter – babysit, donation – donate, gambler – gamble, hazy – haze” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 30).

Stašková (2013) classified the process of back-formation into nine categories depending on the morphological structure, the type of word that is employed for the back-formation and the kind of morpheme deleted. Type number one is “verb from agent/instrument noun” e.g. “deal (1988)” from “dealer; to be dealer in something, sell” (p. 34) and type two is “verb from action noun” e.g. ‘microcode (1985)’ from ‘microcoding’ (p. 37). Types number three and four are “verb from adjective” e.g. ‘auto-destruct (1980)’ from ‘auto-destructive; self-destruct’ (p. 39); “noun from adjective” e.g. ‘decaf (1988)’ from “decaffeinated; informal: decaffeinated coffee” (p. 41).

Stašková (2013) explains that type number five is when an adjective is formed from a noun e.g. ‘desertified (1980)’ from “desertification; transformed onto desert” (p. 42). This adjective goes through diverse steps to be created, first, the noun ‘desertification’ turns into the verb ‘desertify’ and then, applying the past participle ending –ed, the adjective is

created. Type number six is when a noun that comes from “another noun which is believed to be its derivative” is formed as in the case of the word ‘fact-find’ whose meaning is described as “fact-finding; an instance of fact-finding” (p. 43). Type number seven is “prefixal back-formations” where the word is shortened by removing the prefix as in ‘concerting (adj. 2003)’ from ‘disconcerting’, meaning “appropriate, satisfying” (p. 44).

Type eight is “inflectional back-formation”. In this type of back-formation, an original Latin or Greek word, ‘gradiolus’, for example, becomes ‘gladiola’ in English through the deletion of -lus and the addition of the plural ending to designate a singular flower. Finally, type nine is when an adjective is created from agent noun as is the case of the word ‘carbureted’ from ‘carburettor’ (Stašková, 2013, p. 45).

#### 3.2.1.4. Acronyms

An acronym is a shortened version of a chain of words in which the initial letter of each word is used to make the word. As opposed to abbreviations (section 3.2.1.5), acronyms are pronounced as a word following the phonological rules of the language. For example, the acronym ‘RADAR’ from “radio detecting and ranging” (Sayadi, 2011) is pronounced /'reɪdə/. Table 1 contains some more examples of acronyms.

Table 1: Examples of acronyms

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Source</b>
URL (pronounced / ɜ:l/)	<u>U</u> niform <u>r</u> esource <u>l</u> ocator
GUI (pronounced / gu:i/)	<u>G</u> raphical <u>u</u> ser <u>i</u> nterface
DOS (pronounced /dɔ:s/)	<u>D</u> isc <u>o</u> perating <u>s</u> ystem
SCSI (pronounced /skʌzi/)	<u>S</u> mall <u>c</u> omputer <u>s</u> ystem <u>i</u> nterface
LAN (pronounced /læn/)	<u>L</u> ocal <u>a</u> rea <u>n</u> etwork
GIF (pronounced /gif/)	<u>G</u> raphics <u>i</u> nterchange <u>_</u> ormat

An additional example of an acronym is ‘lol’ (laugh out laugh) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29) and an acronym that has been recently included in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021) is ‘BIPOC’. BIPOC is an acronym that refers to Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Colour.

### 3.2.1.5. Abbreviations

Abbreviations are the creation of new words based on shortening a word or phrase. A subtype of abbreviation is the so-called orthographic abbreviation which consists of a shortened word whose pronunciation corresponds to the non-abbreviated word as in ‘St.’ and ‘Mt.’ for ‘saint’ and ‘mount’, ‘Mr.’ pronounced as ‘mister’ or ‘Dr.’ from ‘doctor’ (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29). Initialisms are also a kind of an abbreviation which are pronounced letter by letter such as in the examples provided in table 2 (Sayadi, 2011).

Table 2: Examples of abbreviations and their sources

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>Source</b>
www	<u>W</u> orld <u>W</u> ide <u>W</u> eb
IT	<u>I</u> nformation <u>T</u> echnology
HTML	<u>H</u> yper <u>t</u> ext <u>M</u> arkup <u>L</u> anguage
OOP	<u>O</u> bject- <u>O</u> riented <u>P</u> rogramming
HDL	<u>H</u> ardware <u>D</u> escription <u>L</u> anguage
I/O	<u>I</u> nput/ <u>O</u> utput
IP	<u>I</u> nternet <u>P</u> rotocol
FTP	<u>F</u> ile <u>T</u> ransfer <u>P</u> rotocol/ <u>F</u> ile <u>T</u> ransfer <u>P</u> rogram

A new abbreviation that has been included in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021) is ‘ASMR’. ASMR encodes the words “autonomous sensory meridian response”. It is a sensation of pleasure and calm when noticing specific sounds or movements.

### 3.2.2. Compounding

Compounds are built by joining already existing words. Compounds can be analysed from three different points of view: the structural aspect, the semantic aspect and the lexical aspect (Behera & Mishra, 2013).

From the structural point of view, there are also three types: the neutral aspect, the morphological aspect and the syntactic aspect. The neutral aspect is the combination of two stems with no linking component such as ‘tallboy’ and ‘blackbird’. The morphological aspect is the combination of two stems with a consonant or a vowel functioning as a linking unit such as “handiwork, handicraft, craftsmanship, spokesman”

(Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29). Finally, the syntactic aspect refers to the combination of different categories of words—including nouns, verbs, articles, adverbs and prepositions—that appear together and are usually linked with a hyphen as in: “lily-of-the-valley, good-for-nothing, mother-in-law, sit-at-home, pick-me-up, know-all, know-nothing, go-between, get-together” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29).

Behera & Mishra (2013) divide the semantic aspect into three groups: compounds in which the combination of the meanings of the two words leads to a word whose meaning can be predicted as in the case of “classroom, bedroom, working-man, dining-room, sleeping-car, dancing-hall” (p. 29); compounds in which the combination of the words has produced a word with a new meaning such as “blackboard, blackbird, football, lady-killer, good-for-nothing, lazybones” (p. 29); and compounds that have lost their original meaning as in ‘ladybird’, which is not a bird, but an insect, ‘tallboy’, which does not mean a boy who is tall but a piece of furniture, ‘bluestocking’ an intellectual or literary woman, and ‘bluebottle’, which designates both a flower and an insect but never a bottle (pp. 29-30).

Finally, the lexical aspect distinguishes between word combinations and compounds. For instance, the word-combination ‘tall boy’ is different from the compound ‘tallboy’ since the meaning of the latter might not coincide with the addition of the meaning of the independent elements that conform it, which we have already mentioned before (Behera & Mishra, 2013).

Some modern compound neologisms that have been inserted in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021) and in the *Cambridge University Press Dictionary* (2021) are ‘crowdfunding’ and ‘sadwear’. ‘Crowdfunding’ is a compound created by the combination of the words ‘crowd’ and ‘funding’ and its meaning is to ask for money massively (sometimes online) with the aim of creating a new business. ‘Sadwear’ is also a compound created from the combination of the words ‘sad’ and ‘wear’, and it refers to clothes that reduce the sadness felt by the person who wears them.

### 3.2.3. Affixation/derivation

Derived words are words created with already existing words and the help of affixes (Onyedum, 2012). An affix is defined as “a bound morpheme that attaches to bases” (Plag, 1983, p. 90). Accordingly, derivation or affixation is a word-formation process in which affixes (prefixes or suffixes) are added to the root of a word to build new words. These affixes are usually morphologically bound, that is, they cannot appear alone as a word. Some of the most common affixes are: “a-”, “co-”, “de-”, “dis-”, “-able”, “-er”, “-ism”, “-tion” and “-less” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 30). Thanks to these affixes, new words are created such as ‘endistancement’, ‘tracklement’, ‘underlayment’ (suffix: -ment) (Plag, 2002, p. 96), ‘gamification’ (suffix -tion) or ‘hyperconnectivity’ (-ity) (Onyedum, 2012, pp. 74-75). An example of a new neologism that has been created through affixation, in particular, through the addition of the prefix “co-” is ‘coworking’ (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2021). The word refers to people who work together and share a particular workplace, ideas, knowledge and equipment.

The formation of new words in English is influenced by the productivity of certain affixes or patterns (Bauer et al., 2015). However, productivity varies with time, and an affix that may have been productive in the past —leading to multiple neologisms— may not be productive any longer, this is the measure called “extent of use” (Plag, 2002, p. 66). An example of derivational productivity is the suffix “-er” that creates neologisms such as “birder, real estater, bubblegummer, miler, heartacher, mudder, porker, homer, birther, domainer” (Ryden, 1999, as cited in Bauer et al., 2015, p. 252). In addition, it is important to note that the affixes employed to create neologisms need to provide the word with semantic transparency and economy (Plag, 2002).

### 3.2.4. Reduplication

Reduplications are created by doubling the stem of a word and are usually associated with colloquial speech or slang. There are two ways to produce reduplications: (i) without phonetic variations, such as ‘bye-bye’ for ‘good-bye’, and (ii) with a change in one of the roots vowels or consonants, as in ‘ping-pong’ and ‘chit-chat’. More examples of reduplication are ‘walkie-talkie’ (a portable radio), ‘riff-raff’ (the worthless or disreputable element of society; the dregs of society), and ‘chi-chi’ (slang for chic as in a chi-chi girl) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 31).

### 3.3 Making non-formal changes to a word

Some neologisms are existing lexical words which have undergone a change which does not affect the form of the original word as it is the case of the categories that I will explain next. First, I will discuss neologisms that have maintained the form of the existing word but have acquired a different meaning (3.3.1), then I will present eponyms (3.3.2.), followed by the process of conversion (3.3.3.) and, finally, I will explain collocations, namely, the new combination of words (3.3.4.).

#### 3.3.1 Same word with different meaning

As we have already said, some neologisms are words that already exist but with a new meaning. Nowadays “[t]he all pervasive application of computers and the Internet has been a key procreation ground for this progression, with new senses for words such as window, mouse, bug, virus, surf, net and web now being part of everyday English” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 27). Since these words have both their old and new meanings they have become polysemic words as in the case of “Hostess: The previous meaning: A woman who has guests - The latest meaning: Sex-worker, Footprint: The previous meaning: the mark made by a person’s or animal’s foot -The latest meaning: An impact on our planet” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 30). The grammatical category of these words is the same as that of the original word.

#### 3.3.2 Eponyms

Eponyms are words inspired on existing proper names (a place, person, animal, etc.). They can be real or imaginary and they can only be included in the language when they are widespread and known well enough. Some other instances of eponyms are ‘atlas’ from the proper name of Atlas, ‘boycott’ from the proper name of Charles C. Boycott, ‘cereal’ from Ceres and ‘nicotine’ from Jean Nicot (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29).

#### 3.3.3 Conversion

Conversion is the word-formation process according to which all that changes is the grammatical category of the new word, as the spelling and the pronunciation of the original word are maintained in the new word. Experts distinguish between two different

types of conversion. The first kind is Verbification, according to which a new verb is created from a noun, e.g. from ‘email’ (noun) to ‘to email’ (verb), from ‘microwave’ (noun) to ‘to microwave’ (verb) or from ‘bottle’ (noun) to ‘to bottle’ (verb). The second kind of conversion is Nominalisation under which a new noun is created from a verb as in ‘alert’ (noun) from ‘to alert’ (verb) or ‘cry’ (noun) from ‘to cry’ (verb) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 31).

#### 3.3.4 Collocations: new combination of words

Words frequently collocate in English. This happens when two or more words usually cooccur together. Native speakers are usually very sensitive to collocations and, when a word different from the word that is generally used is chosen, the speaker will not like that word combination, even though the meaning is the same (e.g. you ‘make your bed’, you do not ‘do your bed’). A new combination of two or more words frequently appearing together may be considered a neologism. Examples that illustrate this kind of neologisms are ‘fast food’ (but not ‘quick food’), ‘a quick shower’ (but not ‘a fast shower’) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 28).

### 3.4 External influence

Some neologisms are based on a foreign word or are influenced by a foreign language or culture. It is in this context that the following categories emerge: borrowings/loanwords (3.4.1.), transferred words (3.4.2.), internationalisms (3.4.3.) and calquing (3.4.4.). The distinction between borrowings, internationalisms and transferred words is not always clear.

#### 3.4.1 Borrowings/loanwords

Borrowings, also referred to as loanwords, are those words that have been taken from one language to be incorporated into another. Examples of borrowings are the following: “algebra – Arabic, chow mein – Chinese, kielbasa – Polish, murder – French, near – Sanskrit, pizza – Italian” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 31). More examples of borrowings are ‘kindergarten’, an originally German word that means playschool, and ‘sushi’, a Japanese word for a typical Japanese dish (Sayadi, 2011, para. 38). A new neologism that has been introduced in *the Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021) is ‘hygge’, This is a



borrowing from Danish and that has been transferred to English without changes to its original word form and it means the feeling of comfortability or well-being due to a cosy environment.

#### 3.4.2 Internationalisms

This type of neologism stands for borrowings or loanwords that are used in multiple languages with a similar form and meaning. Occasionally, internationalisms arise massively as a result of an increase of innovations, as in the case of the vocabulary for computing. Nowadays most of the words to talk about computing all over the world are English words (computer, disk, and spam) (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29). Other examples of this type of neologism are Indian words such as “bungalow, jute, khaki, mango, pyjamas, and sari” (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29).

#### 3.4.3 Transferred words

Transferred words are new words that maintain the form they had in the language they were first created in. These words do not change when they are used in different countries because they are usually brand names, cultural manifestations such as ‘Kungfu’ (Sayadi, 2011, para. 27), new food (‘Momo’) or brands of clothes such as, ‘Adidas’ or ‘Nike’ (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 29).

#### 3.4.4 Calquing

Behera and Mishra (2013) define calquing as the word-formation process in which a word or expression in a language is literally translated into a different language. This process can be illustrated in the examples of the English expression ‘blue-blood’ which has become ‘sangre azul’ in Spanish, the Latin expression ‘locus commūnis’ which has become ‘Lehnwort’ in German, ‘pineapple’ ‘pijnappel’ in Dutch, and ‘scapegoat’ ‘ez ozel’ in Hebrew (Behera & Mishra, 2013, p. 31).

#### **4. The sources of neologisms nowadays**

All languages change over time and the reasons why neologisms arise are diverse. However, the new developments in technology, economy, politics and other new social contexts that have taken place in the 1990s have had a very important impact on the creation of neologisms in English and in languages across the world. The new words that have been created are spread more quickly than ever before (Abbas, 2009) through the Internet in a globalised world and, knowledge, entertainment and culture are also easily transmitted. In this section, I will consider five areas in which many neologisms can be found nowadays: technology/science, political developments, the COVID-19 pandemic, advertising and the news, and we will see some of the processes that were discussed in the previous section at work.

##### 4.1. Technology/science

According to Abbas (2009), “the ever changing world of technology has aided a constant changing of the English language” (p. 2). Sometimes the “jargon vocabulary” used in the field of technology has led to the creation of new words (new coinages), and other times new concepts have been labelled with existing English words that have adopted a completely new meaning such as ‘mouse’ or ‘keyboard’ (Abbas, 2009).

The Internet, a new technological development, is also the source for emerging vocabulary. In his study, Tugiyanto (2015) analysed the five most frequently used new words in 20 countries — six Inner Circle countries (the countries in which the English language is considered the first language, such as USA, Ireland, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia), and fourteen Outer Circle countries (the countries where English has been introduced as a result of colonialism such as India, Jamaica, Tanzania, Singapore, Ghana, Bangladesh, South Africa). He concluded that, although there are many varieties of English, approximately twenty, the pattern of the frequency of the Internet neologisms was very similar. The most frequently used five words were, in order of frequency, ‘download’, ‘tweet’, and ‘upload’ (these words can work as either verbs or nouns), and ‘hashtag’ and ‘apps’, which can only be used as nouns. However, ‘download’ and ‘upload’ were more common in Outer Circle countries, whereas ‘tweet’ was more popular in Inner Circle countries, perhaps due to the differences in cultural and social level and the popularity and availability of technologies in these countries.

These neologisms have resulted in new collocations. Table 3 shows the most frequently used noun collocates of the verbs and the most frequently used adjectives collocates of the nouns (Tugiyanto, 2015, p. 73).

Table 3: Noun collocates and adjective collocates

Noun Collocates of the Verbs		Adjective Collocates of the Nouns	
<b>Verbs</b>	Frequent <i>noun</i> collocates	Frequent <i>adjective</i> collocates	<b>Nouns</b>
download	music apps files PDF movies/videos software games books	free digital illegal direct immediate/instant fast(er) single	download
Upload	photo(s)/images/picture(s) videos files content	instant direct faster unlimited latest	upload
Tweet	picture(s)/pic/photo(s) link(s) message(s) thoughts updates	automatic maximum new slow latest/recent/new original/initial single popular	tweet

Table 4 shows the most common adjective collocates for ‘app/s’ and ‘hashtag’.

Table 4: The most common adjective collocates for ‘app/s’ and ‘hashtag’

Frequent <i>adjective</i> collocates	Nouns
mobile new other free native great third party	app/s
official new popular particular trending common relevant specific promotional dedicated	hashtag

Science and technology have also produced countless neologisms that have been included in the speakers’ common and daily vocabulary. For example, ‘e-mail’ and ‘blog’ are two new terms in the field of technology, and ‘black holes’ and ‘quarks’ in science (Girard, 2007). Technological and scientific neologisms are frequently created through affixation, as for instance through the prefix ‘nano’ meaning ‘tiny’ to create the new words ‘nanobiology’, ‘nanochemistry’ and ‘nanoscience’ (Ramsden, 2016, pp. 305-306).

#### 4.2. New political situations

The existence of new political situations in the last decade has also been the source of neologisms. A good example is the creation of the neologism ‘Brexit’. The term emerged in 2012 to describe the intention of Britain to leave the European Union. This word was first employed in print and social media in the UK but has now been spread to other languages and countries in the world. It might have found its inspiration in the word ‘Grexit’, the result of the blend ‘Greek’ and ‘exit’, when Greece was in debt with the European Union and the possibility of Greece leaving the EU was considered. In any case, although the neologism ‘Brexit’ has not been included in dictionaries, it does appear

in Wikipedia and it was awarded the word of the year by the *Collins Dictionary* in 2016 (Fontaine, 2017).

‘Brexit’ is a peculiar example of blending since one of its components, ‘exit’, does not lose any of its parts. ‘Exit’, comes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular of the Latin verb ‘exire’ which was borrowed by Middle English as a noun, conforming the actual noun ‘exit’ (Oxford University Press, 2015, as cited in Fontaine, 2017). Like many blending neologisms, ‘Brexit’ has taken several other forms until its current predominant form has been established. For instance, the blending ‘Brexit’ was sometimes produced as ‘Brixit’, but this variation did not last much. However, according to Fontaine, it may be possible that the blending will keep on developing for some more time since it is still a topic of debate. Whatever its form, news media as well as speakers are conscious of the innovative character of the term so it is usually presented in single and double inverted commas, and after “so-called” indicating, therefore that it is a new term (Fontaine, 2017, p. 4).

#### 4.3. The COVID-19 pandemic

More than ever before the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the world is connected, and this pandemic has been the inspiration for the massive new production of neologisms that have arrived suddenly.

The recent research conducted by Asif et al. (2020) had the objective of exploring the emergence of neologisms during the pandemic from January 2020 to April 2020 and their use in articles, books, the Oxford corpus, social media and five websites. Among the new terms, they found two recently coined words that were very popular. The neologisms are ‘covidiot’ and ‘covidient’. The meaning of these words is very intuitive. ‘Covidiot’, a blend of ‘coronavirus’ and ‘idiot’, describes a person who does not follow the restrictions to avoid the risk of infection. By contrast, ‘covidient’ represents exactly the opposite: it is a blend between ‘coronavirus’ and ‘obedient’ so that a ‘covidient’ person is a person that follows the rules determined by the government concerning COVID-19. Another example of blending is the word ‘infodemic’ also observed by these researchers. ‘Infodemic’ is a blend that is composed of the combination of the words ‘information’ and ‘epidemic’. Even though this neologism has been recurrently associated with COVID-19, it has been used since 2013 for SARS (Asif et al., 2020).

Other neologisms common during the months of the outbreak of COVID-19 were formed via acronyms and abbreviations. The examples presented in table 5 below were heard and read in the press and the media daily (Asif, et al., 2020, p. 6). This does not mean that words such as ‘WFH’ (i.e. working from home) did not exist before the pandemic because this word was created in 1995. However, many of these words have become part of the speakers’ everyday vocabulary with the pandemic.

Table 5: Abbreviations and Acronyms used during COVID-19

<b>Abbreviations/Acronyms</b>	<b>Description</b>
WFH	“Working from home”
PPE	“Personal protective equipment”
Covid-19	"COVID-19 is the name of the disease that the novel coronavirus causes. It stands for coronavirus disease 2019".
nCoV	“Coronavirus disease 2019”
2019-nCoV	“Coronavirus disease 2019”
ARDS	“Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome”
ARI	“Acute Respiratory Infection”
CDC	“Centres for Disease Control and Prevention”
PUI	“Patient Under Investigation”
PCR	“Polymerase chain reaction”
SARS-CoV-2	“Novel coronavirus 2019 is the name of the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2”
CFR	“Case Fatality Rate”
WHO	“World Health Organization”

The pandemic has also resulted in the spread of new collocations such as ‘social distancing’, ‘community spread’, ‘cordon sanitaire’, ‘droplet transmission’, ‘flattening the curve’, ‘tsunamis of COVID-19 cases’, ‘emerging disease’, ‘solitary confinement’, ‘animal-human interface’, ‘incubation period’, ‘contain the outbreak’ and ‘viral shedding’ (Asif et al, 2020). These new word combinations have made a big impression on the English lexicon.

Two neologisms associated with the COVID-19 pandemic that have already been included in the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2021) are ‘long hauler’ and ‘wet market’. Long hauler is a word combination formed with the words ‘long’ and ‘hauler’. They conform a collocation since both words have a tendency to appear together. It refers to a person that has some side-effects even after they have recovered from the illness. ‘Wet market’ is also a word-combination and collocation refers to a shop that sells fresh meat, fish and other animals.

#### 4.4. Advertising

The presence of neologisms in advertising where it is important to keep up with new trends is highly remarkable. Amid all processes of creation of neologisms, Mostafa (2013) affirms that blending is the most frequent one. Trade workers create words through blends to name products, and then the specialists who carry out the advertising campaigns take advantage of the newness and exclusivity of the neologisms to sound innovative and to catch the consumers’ attention.

Advertising also employs lexical deviation as another source of neologisms frequently. These neologisms attract the customer’s attention and enhance creativity and originality in the field of advertising and this is because deviation aims to break the phonological, grammatical and lexical rules of the language (Ren & Yu, 2013). Frequently, the neologisms that are created through this process are used on one occasion only. These are the so-called “nonce-formations” (Ren & Yu, 2013). An example of nonce-formation provided by Tomáš Vörös (2010) is ‘rock’n Rose’ that takes advantage of the phrase ‘rock’n roll’ and suggests that women will attract attention.

#### 4.5. The news

Neologisms are also found and created in the news. As the purpose of news is to cover the latest events in politics, society, culture, economy and science, among others, news has to keep up with the new concepts and new words needed to talk about them. Additionally new words are also created by the news media. The neologisms that are found in the news are created through the usual processes, such as shortenings, compounds, derivations, loan words and analogies, among others (Zhou, 2016).

Shortenings, that is to say, reduced forms of longer words or phrases, are very frequent in the news because they have the power to express the same content with words or expressions that take less space. Examples of shortenings in the news are ‘varsity’ from the word ‘university’, ‘net’ from the word ‘Internet’ or ‘maths’ from ‘mathematics’. It is also possible to find blends such as ‘celeblog’, a term that combines ‘celebrity’ and ‘blog’, or ‘e-lancer’ a combination of ‘electronic’ and ‘freelancer’ (Zhou, 2016, p. 293).

Neologisms which are loan words, i.e. terms borrowed from another language, are also very frequent in the news. In many occasions, news reports have to cover events that happen in other parts of the world, or they need to refer to foreign concepts. Consequently, the news reporters resort to loan words. For instance, some examples of loan words that have been adopted in English are the Korean word ‘fengshui’, the French word ‘déjà vu’ or the Spanish word ‘salsa’ (these words can also be found in other genres, obviously). Examples of neologisms created through derivation are plentiful in the news such as the words ‘incubator’, ‘regift’ or ‘faunavore’ (Zhou, 2016, pp. 293-294). Another type of neologism employed in the news is analogy, that is, the “cognitive process of transferring information or meaning from a particular source to another” (Zhou, 2016, p. 294). Some examples of analogy are ‘down market’ from ‘upmarket’ and ‘cityscape’ or ‘riverscape’ from ‘landscape’ (Zhou, 2016, p. 294).

## **5. Teaching neologisms in EFL**

Generally speaking, EFL teachers do not usually spend time teaching colloquial words. Therefore, they do not teach neologisms because they are newly created words or words considered to be colloquial in general. However, Rets (2016) suggests that, since neologisms frequently reflect changes in the current culture of the language and developments in technology, science and communication, teaching neologisms to English foreign learners provides the student with the cultural essence of the language. In addition, EFL students frequently have difficulties in understanding neologisms, as argued by Rets (2016) who showed that only 5% of the students were capable of explaining 90% of the neologisms that she had selected from websites, dictionaries of new words and “WordSpy”. Hence, it is important to incorporate neologisms into the vocabulary material presented to the learner and to teach them systematically.



Rets (2016) proposed four strategies to teach neologisms to EFL students. The first strategy is called “*grouping and teaching neologisms according to the underlying themes*” (p. 816). The teacher provides a list of neologisms that are used to talk about a particular topic. For example, if the teacher wants to talk about professions, they can include the neologism ‘open collar’ to refer to a person that works at home (this new expression is an addition to other expressions which look very similar, such as ‘blue collar’, ‘white collar’, that have been accepted in the dictionaries). For example, Rets (2016) mentions that if the theme is the press and the media, the teacher could include the neologism ‘rumorazzi’, a blending that comes from ‘rumour’ and ‘paparazzi’ (p. 816).

The second one is about “*providing meaningful contextual clues and background information along with neologisms*” (Rets, 2016, p. 817). This strategy opts for mentioning the context of the neologism so that the student can understand its meaning and how it is used. She presents the example of ‘downtick’ which could be confusing for students without a background since they can relate it to a clock’s mechanism instead of the meaning she is looking for, that is a trend in decrease. She solves this simply by placing the term in a full sentence “a downtick in the unemployment rate is welcome news” (Rets, 2016, p. 817). She is also aware of the fact that providing some background can affect positively the students’ knowledge of etymology. To illustrate this Rets (2016) comments on the neologism ‘oilgate’, which referred to the political conflict of a petrol company in South Africa. The exposure of this neologism facilitated the learning of the ending –gate, which means scandal, when facing terms with the same structure such as “Billygate, Muldergate, Reagangate, Motorgate” (p. 817). However, she raises the constraint that this strategy has: time. Sometimes there is not enough time in the classroom and the interests of the students may be pointing in another direction at that moment.

Another strategy is “*providing an image associated with a neologism*” (Rets, 2016, p. 817). This strategy focuses on the association of images to the neologisms so that students can process and remember them better because, as Rets (2016) points out, originality and imagination intensify students’ understanding of the subject. For instance, an image that showed a ‘thumb down’ could be linked to the neologism ‘downvote’ to refer to online disapproval (Rets, 2016).

Thirdly, she suggests “*grouping and teaching neologisms to advanced English learners according to the intralinguistic factors*” (Rets, 2016, p. 817). Intralinguistic factors include the systematisation of the lexicon, that is, the production of words belonging to the same type, as ‘dealer’ that has been presented recurrently with other nouns such as ‘art dealer’ or ‘car dealer’, and the generalisation of the use of a word beyond its original register, as in the case of ‘hyperventilate’ which was originally a technical term in medicine but now is used commonly to refer to become overexcited (Rets, 2016).

While Rets (2016) raises the idea of organising a lesson focused on neologisms only, she concludes that this is not a favourable teaching approach and recommends the inclusion of neologisms in combination with the process of teaching plain new words.

## **6. Conclusions**

Neologisms are constantly being created in the English language, frequently through traditional word formation processes of English morphology. In some cases, they are formed from a word that already exists in the language but with a new meaning or they are the result of changing some aspect of its form, in other cases, a new form is incorporated directly. Some new words are simply incorporated in the language because of the need for a new term with a particular meaning or because speakers find some words easier than others.

Recently, many neologisms have been added to the English language because of the many developments in fields such as technology and science, among others, and, the birth of the Internet, the tool that has put the whole world in contact as it has never been before, has facilitated the spread of these words. The news has also led to the spread of new words to refer to political issues through the traditional means and the new formats of social media. Additionally, neologisms have appeared in many other areas such as advertising, that employs neologisms to sound new and attractive, and the pandemic of COVID-19 has also been the source of neologisms. In short, this paper has provided an overview of the creation and the presence of neologisms in English and has discussed the importance of teaching neologisms in the EFL classroom. Finally, I believe that more research on neologisms and particularly on the effect of globalisation in the production and spread of neologisms would be an interesting topic for future research.

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