

**NEOLOGISMS AND WORD-FORMATION PROCESSES IN CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH (2020–2026): A STUDY OF MORPHOLOGICAL PRODUCTIVITY IN
DIGITAL DISCOURSE****Jurayeva Raisa Ismat kizi**

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Raisajurayeva@gmail.com**Abstract**

This article examines neologisms and dominant word-formation processes in contemporary English during the period 2020–2026. The selected timeframe is linguistically significant due to the rapid expansion of digital communication, the global COVID-19 pandemic, and the technological boom driven by artificial intelligence. These factors created favourable conditions for lexical innovation, resulting in the emergence and widespread diffusion of new lexical units across social media platforms, online journalism, and everyday speech. The study aims to identify the most productive word-formation mechanisms in modern English neologisms and to analyse their sociolinguistic motivations. The data for the study consist of neologisms collected from digital media discourse and recent lexical updates in contemporary dictionaries. The neologisms were classified into major word-formation categories, including compounding, blending, affixation, acronymisation, clipping, conversion, borrowing, and semantic innovation.

The findings suggest that compounding and blending remain the most productive processes, particularly in the domains of technology, politics, and health-related communication. The paper argues that neologism formation in the period 2020–2026 reflects not only structural tendencies of English morphology but also pragmatic pressures such as speed, expressiveness, and viral dissemination.¹

Keywords: neologisms, word formation, blending, compounding, affixation, digital discourse, contemporary English, lexical innovation

Introduction

Language is a dynamic system that constantly adapts to social, cultural, and technological changes. One of the clearest indicators of linguistic change is the emergence of neologisms, which may be defined as newly coined words or expressions that enter common usage within a particular speech community.² Neologisms play a central role in lexical enrichment, reflecting the evolving needs of speakers to describe new realities, objects, and experiences. English, due to its global status and openness to lexical borrowing and innovation, has historically been one of the most productive languages in terms of neologism formation.³

The period between 2020 and 2026 represents an exceptional stage of lexical creativity. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting global transformations produced an immediate demand for new terminology related to health, restrictions, social behaviour, and online work. At the same time, the development of artificial intelligence technologies and the rise of digital culture contributed to the creation of new lexical items. Modern communication channels such as Twitter/X, TikTok, Reddit, and online journalism played a crucial role in spreading these innovations, often turning temporary slang into widely recognised vocabulary.⁴

¹ Ingo Plag, *Word-Formation in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

² John Algeo, "The Growth of Vocabulary," in *The Cambridge History of the English Language*, Vol. 6, ed. John Algeo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp 1–57.

³ Laurie Bauer, *English Word-Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁴ David Crystal, *Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide* (London: Routledge, 2011).

From a linguistic perspective, neologisms are significant not only because they represent new meanings, but also because they demonstrate the productivity of word-formation mechanisms. In contemporary English, new words are rarely created randomly; instead, they are formed through established processes such as compounding, blending, affixation, clipping, acronymisation, and conversion.⁵ This article investigates the dominant word-formation patterns of English neologisms during 2020–2026. The main purpose is to identify which processes are most productive and to analyse the sociolinguistic motivations behind their popularity. The research is guided by the following questions: Which word-formation processes are most productive in English neologisms between 2020 and 2026? and what pragmatic and cultural factors influence the emergence and diffusion of these lexical items?

Literature review

The study of neologisms has long been an important topic in lexicology and morphology. Scholars such as Bauer and Plag emphasise that neologisms provide valuable insight into the productivity of word-formation processes and the adaptability of language to new communicative demands.⁶ Word formation is often defined as the linguistic mechanism through which new lexical items are created from existing morphemes, words, or patterns.

Ingo Plag argues that the productivity of word-formation processes is not equally distributed: some processes are more productive because they are simpler, more transparent, and more easily interpretable by speakers. Laurie Bauer also highlights that word-formation is strongly influenced by both internal linguistic constraints and external sociocultural pressures. These ideas are essential for analysing contemporary English neologisms, as many of them are shaped by online culture, where brevity and creativity are highly valued.

David Crystal, in his work on the English language and digital communication, points out that the internet has significantly accelerated lexical change. Online environments allow new words to spread globally within hours, creating conditions for rapid adoption and lexical stabilisation.⁷

This has been particularly evident in the pandemic era, when terms such as *lockdown*, *social distancing*, and *self-isolation* became universal.

Another important concept in neologism studies is **lexicalisation**, the process through which a newly coined word becomes widely accepted and enters dictionaries. While many neologisms remain temporary and disappear after a short period, others become stable elements of the lexicon. Researchers suggest that lexicalisation depends on frequency, cultural relevance, and communicative usefulness.⁸

Methodology

The study uses a descriptive and analytical approach to classify neologisms according to major word-formation processes in contemporary English. The dataset consists of approximately **200 neologisms** that emerged or became widely popular between 2020 and 2026. The lexical items were collected from multiple sources, including online news discourse, social media platforms, and recent dictionary updates. Particular attention was given to words associated with the domains of health, technology, artificial intelligence, politics, and lifestyle,

⁵ George Yule, *The Study of Language*, 7th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶ P. H. Matthews, *Morphology: An Introduction to the Theory of Word-Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷ David Crystal, *Language and the Internet*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ Jean Aitchison, *Language Change: Progress or Decay?*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

as these areas showed high levels of lexical innovation. The selection criteria for the dataset were as follows:

1. The word or expression must have gained popularity during 2020–2026.
2. The lexical item must have appeared frequently in digital media discourse.
3. The word should demonstrate a clear word-formation pattern that can be categorised within established morphological frameworks.

After collection, the neologisms were classified into the following categories: **compounding, blending, affixation, acronymization/initialism, clipping, conversion, borrowing, and semantic innovation**. Each item was analysed in terms of its morphological structure and communicative function. The frequency and prominence of each word-formation category were then evaluated to identify the most productive processes.

Although this study provides a structured classification, it has limitations. Some neologisms may belong to multiple categories (for example, hybrid forms that involve both blending and compounding). In such cases, classification was based on the most dominant structural mechanism. Additionally, because digital discourse evolves rapidly, some words included in the dataset may lose relevance over time.

Results: Productive Word-Formation processes (2020–2026)

1. Compounding

The analysis shows that **compounding** is the most productive word-formation process in contemporary English neologisms. Compounding involves the combination of two or more existing words to form a new lexical item. This process is highly productive because compounds are usually semantically transparent and easily interpretable by speakers. Examples include:

- vaccine passport
- climate anxiety
- Zoom fatigue
- cancel culture
- work-from-home (WFH as a related acronym)

Compounds are particularly common in political and social commentary because they allow speakers to label complex phenomena in a concise way. For instance, *climate anxiety* describes a psychological condition linked to environmental concerns, while *Zoom fatigue* became widely used during the pandemic to describe exhaustion caused by excessive video conferencing.

2. Blending

The second most productive process is **blending**, which involves merging parts of two words to create a new form. Blends are often used in informal contexts, especially in internet communication, because they sound creative and humorous. Examples include:

- covidiot (COVID + idiot)
- infodemic (information + epidemic)
- staycation (stay + vacation)
- doomscrolling (doom + scrolling)

Blending became particularly productive during the pandemic because speakers used humour and irony to cope with stressful realities. Terms such as *covidiot* were used to criticise irresponsible behaviour, while *infodemic* captured the widespread problem of misinformation.

3. Affixation

Affixation, including prefixation and suffixation, remains a productive process. English frequently uses prefixes such as anti-, post-, de-, and mis- to form new words. Examples include:

- anti-vax
- post-COVID
- deplatform
- misinformation
- microtargeting

Affixation is especially common in political and technological discourse because it allows speakers to create words that express ideological positions (anti-vax) or new technological actions (deplatform).

4.Acronymisation and Initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are extremely common in modern digital communication due to the need for brevity. Many technological and workplace terms became popular during this period. Examples include:

- WFH (work from home)
- NFT (non-fungible token)
- LLM (large language model)
- AI (artificial intelligence)

This process reflects the growing influence of professional and technological jargon in everyday speech. Acronyms are often adopted quickly because they are efficient, and social media encourages shorter expressions.

5.Clipping

Clipping, the shortening of longer words, also increased in frequency, especially in informal speech and online discourse.

Examples include:

- vax (vaccine/vaccination)
- app (application)
- influencer → influ (informal slang)
- admin (administration)

Clippings are driven by communicative economy and the fast-paced nature of online communication.

6.Conversion

Conversion (or zero derivation) occurs when a word changes its grammatical category without morphological modification. This process remains productive in English because the language has limited inflectional marking. Examples include:

- to Zoom (from the noun Zoom)
- to Google (already established but still productive as a model)
- to friend/unfriend
- to cancel (semantic and pragmatic expansion)

Conversion is common in technology-related discourse, where brand names often become verbs.

7.Borrowing and semantic innovation

Borrowing was less productive compared to other processes, but it still played a role, particularly through global cultural exchange. Additionally, many existing words underwent

semantic **shift**, developing new meanings in digital contexts. Examples of semantic innovation include:

- cloud (from weather to digital storage)
- thread (expanded meaning in social media)
- cancel (new pragmatic meaning in social activism)
- jailbreak (traditional meaning expanded to AI contexts)

Semantic innovation is important because it shows that neologism formation is not only morphological but also semantic and pragmatic.

Discussion

The findings indicate that **compounding and blending dominate neologism formation between 2020 and 2026**. This dominance can be explained by several sociolinguistic and pragmatic factors.

First, compounding remains highly productive because it is structurally transparent. Speakers can easily decode the meaning of compounds such as *vaccine passport* or *climate anxiety* without additional explanation. This is essential in public discourse, especially during global crises when new terms must be understood quickly.

Second, blending reflects the expressive and humorous tendencies of online culture. Digital discourse often values creativity, irony, and emotional impact. Blends such as *covidiot* and *doomscrolling* function not only as labels but also as tools for evaluation and criticism. They carry strong pragmatic meaning and often express attitudes toward social behaviour. This supports the argument that neologisms are not purely linguistic innovations but also sociocultural constructions.

Affixation and acronymisation are also significant. The popularity of prefixes such as anti- and post- suggests that neologisms are often used to express ideological positions and temporal relations. The term post-COVID, for instance, indicates how the pandemic became a reference point for defining historical stages. Acronyms such as WFH and LLM reflect the professionalisation of digital discourse, where specialised terms spread rapidly from technical communities to the general public.

Clipping and conversion demonstrate the influence of communicative economy. Modern speakers, especially in social media contexts, tend to prefer shorter forms. Words such as *vax* became widespread because they are convenient, informal, and emotionally neutral compared to the full term *vaccination*. Conversion is similarly economical because it allows speakers to create verbs quickly from nouns, as seen in *to Zoom*.

An important observation is that neologisms in this period are strongly connected to global events and technological change. The pandemic produced a wave of health-related vocabulary, while AI development created a new lexical field involving terms such as *prompt engineering* and *jailbreak* in AI contexts. These innovations show how language responds immediately to new realities.

Another significant factor is the role of media platforms in diffusion. Social media enables neologisms to spread rapidly through repetition, memes, and viral discourse. A word can move from a niche online community into mainstream usage within weeks, especially if it is associated with a widely shared experience.

Overall, the period 2020–2026 demonstrates a high level of lexical creativity, with word-formation processes functioning as tools for naming new realities, expressing emotions, and constructing social identity. Neologisms often reflect collective experiences and ideological debates, making them valuable material for linguistic and cultural analysis.

Conclusion

This study has examined neologisms and dominant word-formation processes in contemporary English during the period 2020–2026. The analysis demonstrates that compounding and blending are the most productive mechanisms of neologism formation, followed by affixation and acronymisation. These processes dominate because they are efficient, creative, and well suited to the communicative environment of digital discourse.

The results also show that neologisms are shaped by major sociocultural forces, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of artificial intelligence, and the globalisation of online communication. Many neologisms function not only as neutral labels but also as expressive tools that reflect attitudes, humour, criticism, and identity construction.

Although this paper provides a structured overview of word-formation productivity, further research could expand the dataset through large-scale corpus analysis and compare neologism formation across different English varieties. Future studies may also investigate which neologisms become fully lexicalised and which disappear as temporary internet slang. Nevertheless, the findings confirm that neologisms remain a key indicator of linguistic change and that modern English continues to demonstrate strong morphological productivity in response to contemporary global realities.