

CONSIDERATIONS ON TERMINOLOGICAL NEOSEMY

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Abstract

The study addresses the terminological neosemical phenomenon as an aspect of neology. It highlights the idea that semantic neology is considered a time-dependent process. The term, as a communication unit, cannot avoid meaning modifications and therefore semantic univocity. The dynamics of specialized meaning should be tracked in relation to the “hard core” of a term meaning and the reference general dictionaries of a language.

Key words: *neology, neoseme, specialized meaning, terminologisation, semantic transfer*

Résumé

Dans ce travail on approche le phénomène de la néosémie terminologique comme aspect de la néologie. On met en évidence l'idée que la néologie sémantique est considérée un processus dépendant du temps. Le terme, en tant qu'unité de communication, ne peut se soustraire aux modifications de sens et, par conséquent, à l'univocité sémantique. La dynamique du sens spécialisée doit être observée par rapport au «noyau dur» de la signification d'un terme et aux dictionnaires généraux de référence d'une langue.

Mots-clés: *néologie, néosème, sens spécialisé, terminologisation, transfert sémantique*

According to Bernard Quemada's statement “a language that knows no form of neology is already a dead language and incontestably the history of all languages is nothing but their neology history”¹.

Terminology as a discipline and social practice is inseparable from *neology*. The term *neology* is not yet unanimously recognized with the same signification. In *Dicționarul de științe ale limbii*, *neology* is defined as “internal and external processes sum of the words of a vocabulary (...) and enrichment with new significations”², and in this way it is circumscribed to the lexicon.

The same source specifies that the term is frequently used in French linguistics and less known and used in Romanian linguistics, the term *creativitate* being preferred (a suggestive title: *Creativitate lexicală în româna actuală* by Adriana Stoichițoiu-Ichim).

The beginning of neology as a science is associated with the issue of the reference monograph of Louis Guilbert, *La créativité lexicale* (1975), one of the most

¹ Quemada, 1971, p. 138.

² DSL, 2005, p. 343.

valuable studies on French neologisms. Referring to the neologism acceptability matter, Guilbert establishes two contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, a limitation of linguistic creativity, because people in their daily communication attend, ordinarily, to patterns, and on the other hand, a permanent endeavour to create new words or modify significances of existent lexical elements.

The discussed study is followed by other significant contributions such as *La néologie française aujourd'hui: observations et réflexions* by André Goosse (1975), *Néologie et lexicologie* by Rosine Adda et alii (1979), *Le management par les mots. Étude sociolinguistique de la néologie* by Fabienne Cusin-Berche (1998), *La néologie en français contemporain: examen du concept et analyse de productions néologiques récentes* by Jean-François Sablayrolles (2000), *Les néologismes* by Jean Pruvost și Jean-François Sablayrolles (2003) and by multiple studies signed by Alain Rey, Louis Déroy, Jacques Boissy, Danielle Candell, Bernard Quemada, Jean-Claude Boulanger, Adrien Hermans, Marie-Françoise Mortureux.

The specialized literature distinguishes between *general neology* and *terminological neology* or *neonymy*, respectively, between *neologisms of common language* and *specialized language* or terminology neologisms, called *neonyms* (new denominations) and *neosemes* (new meanings)³.

Neonyms appear as a denominative necessity and have a greater stability in time than the neologisms of common languages⁴. Neonymy functions therefore in the case of terminological voidness.

Another distinction reported by specialists is between *primary neology* and *translatable neology*⁵: it is considered *primary neology* when a new term is created at the same time as the appearance of a new concept and *translatable neology* when the term and the concept already exists in a language and it is transposed/equalized or its correspondent can be found in another language as a term which did not exist before in the target language. More frequently, we can discuss about primary neology in the case of scientific findings, of research laboratories, of manufacturing of new products, etc. (cf. *smartphone*, *iPad*, *eReader*). Community terminology or *eurolect* is a well-structured case of primary neology, whereas the foundation of the European Union led to the creation of a new conceptual device, which was needed to invent "linguistic labels" as well: *Ombudsman*, *acquis communautaire*, *governments*.

However, within the European Union states and their vicinity, primary community neology (performed in English and/or French) generates various forms of translatable neology in the languages of the states involved in the discussed organism.

The distinction between primary neology and translatable neology is very important for the Romanian language, where the majority of terminological units have their origin in the translation/equalization of terms belonging to other languages (cultures), a phenomenon entraining all the resources of linguistic creativity into achieving more adequate and transparent terms. Otherwise, in relation to the English language, all the languages in the world are in a situation of quasi-systematic translations, a situation that must be faced⁶.

³ Kocourek, 1982; Rondeau, 1984; Quemada, 2007; Bălan Mihailovici, 2003, p. 102.

⁴ Pavel, Rucăreanu, 2001, p. 53.

⁵ Hermans, Vansteelandt, 1999, p. 37.

⁶ Hermans, Vansteelandt, 1999, p. 42.

A neologism is not necessarily an unknown word or expression until a given moment. A neologism can be an existent word to which a new signification is assigned and then it can be a semantic neologism or a *neoseme*: *virus*, *pirate* or *icon* in informatics, *personalization* in car industry, *niche* in economy, etc.

A living language is a dynamic system. Every lexical unit is susceptible to evolve in terms of semantics. A term can overcome an application domain through more general usage, in less specialized contexts. Sometimes new usages can be caused by certain events. For instance, before December 2004 South Asian disaster, the usage of the term *tsunami* was rare and was limited almost exclusively to geology to qualify a phenomenon or a natural disaster. After the disaster, the term is massively used to designate major modifications.

For example, in the francophone area, Coralie Reutenaeur sights the *tsunami bleu* phrase, which refers to electoral victory of UMP (*Union pour un mouvement populaire*) at the 2007 elections, and also *tsunami financier*, a metaphorical denomination of the financial crisis⁷. The usage of the term *tsunami* in the economic domain is observed in Romanian as well: *tsunami financiar*, *tsunami valutar*, *tsunami al creditelor* (*tsunami d'independencia* is an expression that held the headlines in September 2012 in Catalonia, generated by the movement for separation from Spain).

The meaning of *tsunami* in those contexts is no longer the “natural phenomenon”, but the “(financial) crisis” or “(devastating) force”. New meanings designate finances as a source of upheaval – of great extent – of the economic system. Therefore, semantic innovation exists if there is a distinction from a traditional, known signification.

Semantic neology or *neosemy* is characterized by the occurrence of a new signifier for a pre-existent signifier. In linguistics, semantic neology is considered a time-dependent process. Depending on the prospects and research objectives, neosemy can be delimited in a more or less wide manner, taking into account that the dissemination stage with which it is associated varies: from *hapax* where the element of innovation is well marked, but the dissemination is less significant, to a larger number of uses, where the new meaning becomes obvious, but the innovative character is fading. Semantic neology is also associated with a sense of breakage, being perceived as a gap between an existing signification and the new significations within the speech⁸.

The gap between the known signification and the new signification can be established on a linguistic corpus basis created for a certain period, which on the one hand, will provide data regarding the signification before the semantic evolution, and on the other hand, will allow the capturing of the signification associated with a new usage. Therefore, the novelty will be characterized by the distance between a coded significance to a reference source, usually a general language dictionary, and usages from the discursive resources stored in the textual corpus. The repeated presence during a period of time and a large number of usages can confirm the implantation of a new sense and can lead to the integration of semantic modification in the signification of the term.

⁷ Reutenaeur, 2012.

⁸ Reutenaeur, 2012.

The definition of *neosemy* by Rastier and Valette⁹ is justified as a “semantic innovation highlighted through usage”. We highlight the idea that neosemy is noticeable especially through the discursive indices. The indices used to detect a new signification are the *cooccurrences*, which are providing the information about the “vicinities” selected by the neoseme, i.e. about the contextual preferences that contribute to the shaping of a new signification¹⁰.

In terminology, the more frequent neoseme realization procedures are the *specialization* or *terminologisation*, *semantic transfer*, *interdisciplinary transfer*. The term, as a communication unit, cannot avoid the sliding signification effect and therefore semantic unambiguity¹¹.

Terminologisation is the process through which a specialized signification is assigned to a word or a phrase from general language, by analogy (contiguity relation) or through metaphorization: *fereastră* (Fr. *fenêtre*, Engl. *window*), *bombă logică* (Fr. *bombe logique*, Engl. *logic bomb*), *poartă* (Fr. *passerelle*, Engl. *gateway*), *punte* (Fr. *pont*, Engl. *bridge*) in computer science; *cămașă de cilindru* (Fr. *chemise de cylindre*, Engl. *cylinder liner*), *piston cu fustă despicață* (Fr. *piston a jupe fendue*, Engl. *split-skirt piston*), *coajă de portocală* (Fr. *peau d'orange*, Engl. *orange peel*), *dans al conductoarelor* (Fr. *galop des conducteurs*, Engl. *conductor galloping*) in technical terminology, etc. The terminologisation procedure is a generous terminology formation source¹².

Semantic transfer is the process through which an existing term is used to designate another concept through a *logical extension*. For example, a term which designates a concept that corresponds to a concrete object can be expanded to an abstract object, the name of a part may be expanded, metonymically, to designate the whole, the name of the recipient to designate the content, etc. Thus, in informatics, *screen* (Engl.), with the concrete meaning of “monitor component on which the information is being processed” obtained through metonymy and the abstract meaning of “information presented on the computer screen”. In sports, metonymy lies at the basis of new significations emerged in the language of sports announcers: *unsprezece* “football team”, *tricolori* “components of the national team”, *cap* “hitting the ball with the head”, etc.

Interdisciplinary loan is the case where a term belonging to a field is assigned to a new concept in another field, the two concepts being related through analogy, cf. *memorie* (psychology) “capacity of the human brain” and *memorie* (informatics) “provisory storage capacity of a computer”; *virus* (medicine) “pathogen which causes infectious diseases” and *virus* (informatics) “program that copies itself on a computer without the user's knowledge, infecting parts of the operating system or other executable programs”; *fereastră* (construction) “opening in the wall of a building providing visibility” and *fereastră* (informatics) “part of a predefined virtual visible surface”; *algoritm* (mathematics, logistic) “overview of rules and operators to perform an operating system in a given order regarding the solving of problems of some kind” and *algoritm* (political) “leading functions sharing system inside of a coalition,

⁹ 2006; 2009, *apud* Reutenaeur, 2012.

¹⁰ Reutenaeur, 2012.

¹¹ Toma, 2006, p. 168.

¹² Lakoff, Johnson, 1980; Marcus, 1994; Stambuk, 1998; Silaški, Kilyeni, 2011; Butiurca, 2011.

proportional to the share of each participant party”; *segment* (geometry) “part, portion of a figure; a straight portion bordered by two points” and *segment* (economy) “sector; area; volume” (*segmente ale industriei naționale, segment al vânzărilor, segment al pieței*), etc.

In several languages, not only in Romanian, in the environmental domain the neoseme *verde* has imposed itself with its new meaning “environmentally friendly” (synonymous with *ecologic*): Fr. *police verte, PC vert, comptabilité verte*; Engl. *green technology (green tech), green gadgets, green building, green energy*; Rom. *energie verde* “renewable and unpolluted energy sources”, *economie verde, tehnologie verde, industrie verde, agricultură verde, produs verde, ambalaj verde, marketing verde, consumarism verde, accelerație verde, benzină verde, centură verde* (“ecological network representing a wide area encompassing several different ecosystems and habitats for biodiversity”, cf. *Centura verde europeană*), *strategie verde, certificate verzi, soluție “verde”*, etc. In this context, we mention that the neoseme *verde* and the formant *eco-* became synonymous, both referring to the term “environmentally friendly”. The English calque *prietenos cu mediul* (*Environmentally friendly*) is used with the same signification.

The adjective *verde* has another meaning in the phrase *cod verde* from the series of terms which designate various weather phenomena: *cod verde, cod galben, cod portocaliu, cod roșu*. In the forecast codes paradigm, *cod verde* means “dangerous meteorological phenomena are not forecasted”. Respectively, *cod galben* means “predicted weather phenomena are common for the area, but temporarily can become dangerous for certain activities”, *cod portocaliu* – “high intensity dangerous meteorological phenomena are predicted” and *cod roșu* – “high intensity weather phenomena are forecasted”¹³.

The adjective *verde* has also the significance “belonging to the environmental movement” in the expressions *activist verde, militant verde*, its plural form being used mostly: *verzii, partidul verzilor*, usage present in other languages too: French – *les verts*, Italian – *i verdi*.

Therefore, in the environmental domain, the adjective *verde* has at least four meanings:

- a. “color of leaves, grass or generally fresh summer vegetation. *Zonă verde* = portion of land area planted with grass, trees, flowers, etc.”¹⁴, for example, *coridor verde, spații verzi*;
- b. “environmentally friendly, ecological”: *energie verde, produs verde*;
- c. “(forecast) without dangerous weather phenomena”: *cod verde*;
- d. “belonging to the environmental movement”: *activist verde, partidul verzilor*.

An illustrative example for delimitation conditions and imposition of a specialized meaning and for the relationship usefulness between dictionaries and texts is the term *absorbție*, which has developed new meanings in the Romanian language thanks to the relations with the European Union. In the Romanian language of the last few years (after 2007), *absorbție* imposes itself as a neoseme (semantic neologism) recorded only in texts that address problems of the European Union. The term occurs

¹³ <http://www.greatnews.ro/>

¹⁴ DEX, 2009.

in specific contexts: *absorbția fondurilor Uniunii Europene*, *grad de absorbție a fondurilor*, *rată de absorbție*. Collocations or immediate neighbourhoods (*bani europeni*, *fonduri europene*) and specialized expressions (*grad*, *rată de absorbție*, percentally designated) specify the defined significance through the components “to ask and to receive European money” + “using it, managing it” + “in determined conditions (projects of a certain type)”. The new usage contexts of the noun *absorbție* combine extralinguistic data, over a limited period (after 2007 until the present) with the type of text and especially with the specific linguistic contexts which precisely identify the new meaning: “*Absorbția fondurilor UE este esențială pentru creșterea economică a României. O absorbție anuală a unei sume de 3 ori 4 miliarde euro poate genera un plus de creștere economică de cel puțin 1,5% – 2,5% pe an...*” (<http://www.eurofast.eu>); “Cumulând avansul și plățile efectuate, rezultă un total de peste 3 miliarde euro fonduri atrase de România prin PNDR, ceea ce reprezintă un *grad de absorbție al fondurilor europene* ce depășește 30% din totalul fondurilor disponibile pentru dezvoltare rurală...” (<http://www.capital.ro>, 25.08.2011); “România are cea mai mică *rată de absorbție a fondurilor europene* și cel mai mare nivel al corecțiilor financiare, achizițiile publice fiind, din punct[ul] de vedere al greșelilor efectuate în utilizarea banilor, domeniul cel mai sensibil, potrivit Institutului pentru Politici Publice...”¹⁵

In the dictionaries of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the word *absorbție* appears with a general sense “to swallow, sip, suck” and with a figurative sense “to sink with the mind”, then with a specialized meaning of chemistry¹⁶, physics¹⁷ and physiology¹⁸. In the second half of the 20th century (DEX, 1998), *absorbție* is recorded with many specialized meanings and definitions delimited by diastal marks (physics, biology, zootechnics, justice). DEXI 2007 adds several domains and meanings (other legal meanings, an economic meaning, a meaning in logic).

It was remarked that the circulation in common language of some terms leads to a “contextual mobility which may affect their usage”¹⁹. Unlike the “internal” terminology, which is *non contextual*²⁰, as semantic precision allows decontextualisation, in the “external” terminology diversified usages the study of terms is of great concern²¹. Even if the freedom of term-construction in relation to the common language terms is high, there are imposed combinatorial limits resulting within the specialized meaning conditionings. Experts highlight the fact that these limits are determined by relating to *general dictionaries*, which should reflect both specialized meaning and its dynamics.

¹⁵ <http://www.revista22.ro>, 8.04.2013.

¹⁶ Antonescu, 1862.

¹⁷ Costinescu, 1870.

¹⁸ Resmeriță, 1924.

¹⁹ Bidu-Vrănceanu, 2010, p. 16.

²⁰ Rastier, 1995, p. 38-40; Depecker, 2002, p. 56-58.

²¹ Béjoint, Thoiron, 2000, p. 10.

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