
COVID-19 TELESCOPING AND NEOLOGISMS

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Abstract : Every living language has a large number of operations which allows it to maintain its continuity. On the lexical level, neology is the main mechanism. It is considered to be the generator of new forms, which constantly offers the lexical storage new units. The dynamism of this mechanism is proportional to the appearance of new situations which the speaker might encounter. With the covid-19 pandemic, doctors, journalists, politicians and ordinary speakers have found themselves in a situation where the lexical stock at their disposal cannot account for it. Thus, new lexical forms have emerged. Forged from existing forms by derivation, composition, borrowing and telescoping, these neologisms have made it possible to describe and name new realities.

In this study, we will focus on the neologisms obtained by telescoping in order to underline the effect of this crisis on the lexical stock and to trace their trajectory towards fixation and certification with a view to possibly facilitating their subsequent lexicographic processing.

Keywords: Neology - neologism - telescoping - Covid-19

I. Introduction

Taking into account the following observation: A living language is in essence dynamic because it "feeds and lives"¹. This dynamism stems from several lexical, semantic and syntactic parameters. Possessing several processes, a living language is in perpetual renewal. Is it to fill a gap in its system? Is it to meet the needs of these new speakers? Is it to overcome a linguistic monotony?

The answer can be affirmative for all these questions because, far from being arbitrary, this renewal obeys several factors. These are as numerous as the reasons for this perpetual renewal of languages. The procedures available to the language to maintain its continuity are numerous: signifier and signified are affected by these mechanisms. The languages of specialties (language for special purposes) are the most concerned by this renewal given the continual need of these fields to describe new realities given the denominative function of the language. It is the faculty available to a lexeme to designate an object of the world; the linguistic sign used to name, to call, or to give a label to an extralinguistic reality.

We are therefore able to ask ourselves the following questions: what is the contribution of the covid-19 crisis in medical language in particular and in French in general? What solutions has the lexicon offered us so that we can account for a range of new situations that we might encounter during this period of crisis? Our fundamental objective is to show the importance of the mechanism of neology in the conservation of the liveliness of a language and the contribution of the crisis of the coronavirus on the language: a contribution which would be felt only after the crisis which will not be long in enjoying a special lexicographic treatment.

¹Baccouche (1995 : 9)

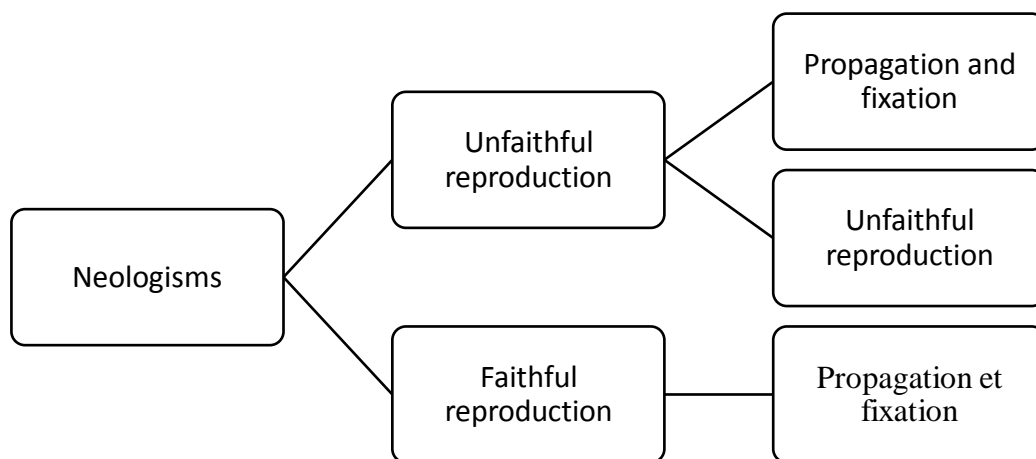
1. Neology: Elixir of long life

Neology is at the crossroads of synchrony and diachrony² on the one hand and language and speech on the other. Born into the mouth of an individual, a neologism ends up settling in the linguistic baggage of the community. But before settling down, it describes a trajectory with well-defined stages going from production to propagation and fixation. Only neologism remains an "SDF: one without a fixed dictionary"³ until the attestation stage.

Every living language oscillates between stability and variation. Indeed, in any living language, there are syntagmatic constants and paradigmatic variables which abide to extralinguistic factors.

Etymologically, the term "neology" is constructed from the association of the Greek prefix [neo] meaning "new" and the Latin suffix [logia] which means "a speaking, discourse, treatise, doctrine, theory, science...". Although the labels vary from one linguist to another (neology, lexical neology, lexical creativity, etc.), the definition of this process is unanimous. It is defined as "the production of new lexical units, either by the appearance of a new form, or by the appearance of a new meaning from the same signifier"⁴. Neology is the process generating new lexical units by forging new forms or by revisiting the meaning of already existing forms. However, paradoxically, neology, which claims to be the mechanism that generates new lexical entities, is not a new concept because this process existed long before the appearance of this label.

Man, who is constantly acquiring new linguistic tools, is constantly forging the lexicon they need to fill a void that risks handicapping them. Thus it tends to revitalize an already existing lexical stock by targeting sometimes the form, sometimes the content; sometimes the signifier, sometimes the signified. And as speech ensures variation in a living language⁵, neology ensures the dynamism of the latter. It also guarantees speech a long life. The new lexical units produced by a Speaker (S) in a situation (s) at a time (t), are propagated by other propagating speakers until they acquire the necessary notoriety and eventually become fixed in the language⁶. The individual and the collective are concerned: one product (a neologism), the other reproduced and shared to the infinite. But this reproduction is not always faithful, hence the snowball effect.



Following its first utterance, a neologism may possibly run through know two spells. It can be faithfully reproduced and follow multiple phases and a natural route to fixation thanks to the extent of its spread and the actors involved. But it can, on the other hand, undergo an unfaithful reproduction which can also lead it to two statuses: either it propagates in its new unfaithful form and fixes itself as such, or it continues to spread

²Guilbert (1973) quoted by Mejri (1995: 19) speaks on this subject of "dynamic synchrony"

³Sablayrolles (2008 : 19-36)

⁴Marcellesi (1974 : 95)

⁵ Saussure (1982 : 30-138)

⁶ Cf Villers (2015) and Zrigue (2018 et 2020)

unfaithfully in several forms which could move away from its initial form consequently falling into oblivion; the neologism in question never ends, in this case, by fixing itself or by being attested. Whether its reproduction is faithful or unfaithful, neologism has the ability to propagate from one speaker to another, sometimes with unprecedented scale. Its fixation in the language is dependent on several factors.

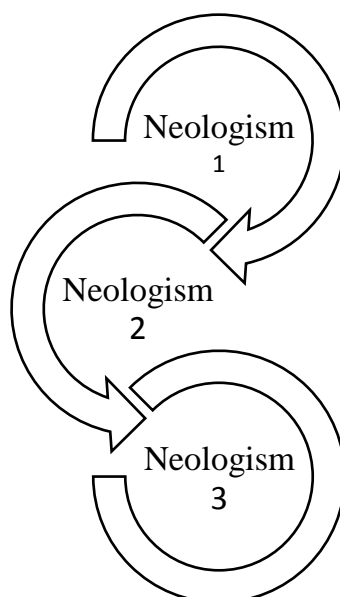
2. The neologisms of covid-19

In this section, we will focus on the neologisms of forms. This is a type of neology which consists of producing forms by means of an operation targeting the form. Several mechanisms have been implemented in the production of these prefixing, suffixing, derivation, composition, telescoping neologisms, etc. In the following section, we will solely concentrate on those which have been forged by telescoping.

The first series of neologisms consists of occurrences formed around the covid forming. But before describing the methods of formation of these neologisms, it is advisable to study the basic form itself which also initially presents a neologism. This is the label given by the World Health Organization to the disease caused by the corona virus. The acronym⁷ *covid-19* is obtained from the assembly of the initials of three words:

- <co> for corona
- <vi> for virus
- <d> for disease (English word)

The number 19 refers to the year. Originally designated by other names like "*nouveau coronavirus 2019*" (new coronavirus 2019) or "*pneumonie de Wuhan*" (Wuhan pneumonia), this pandemic finally had its own scientific label. But this label was not exclusively used in scientific jargon insofar as it gave rise to a panoply of occurrences built around this new form where the effect "snow loop" evoked above:



The forming *covid-19* which is itself considered a neologism has given rise to the formation of other neologisms through other neologic mechanisms.

Consider the following series of examples:

- Covidinfo
- Covidalerte (Covidalert)
- Covidmap

⁷ An acronym is the word obtained by combining the initials of several words like UNICEF, SIDA; these words are pronounced as units and not letter by letter.

Covidinfox
Covidiot
Covidivorce

All these occurrences are obtained by telescoping with our starting acronym covid as an initial base. The second formants of the bag words obtained are respectively <info>, <infox>, <Alert>, <map>, <idiot>, <divorce>.

In the first three examples, telescoping is simple:

[covid + info], with <info> as the information abbreviation, denoting information related to the pandemic.

[Covid + alerte] means alerts related to the pandemic.

[Covid + map] designates the geographic map of the spread of the pandemic.

Nevertheless, telescoping is complex in the case of the second occurrence.

The latter is obtained by the combination of the initial acronym *covid* and *infox*. However, the last form of the suitcase word obtained is itself a neologism obtained by telescoping from the lexeme information (info) and intoxication (intox) hence the meaning of misleading information. Strictly attached to the label designating the disease, the meaning of this component becomes more specific insofar as we are witnessing the restriction of its reference field. The final suitcase word obtained, namely covidinfox, now means providing false information about the pandemic in question.

The last two occurrences present two special cases insofar as the two formants have phonemes in common, hence a merging effect. This is how Covidivorce, which means the type of divorces caused by the pandemic, is obtained by the joining of covid and divorce. The phoneme | d | being common between the two formants, has been kept, for reasons of economy, to the two lexemes at the same time:

Covidivorce → covi_d_ivorce

The *Covidiot* example is obtained by pasting covid to an *idiot*. The phonemes-graphemes | i | and | d | being common and placed at the ends of the two lexemes, ensured the fusion of the two formants; hence the final form:

[Covid + idiot] → cov_id_iot → covidiot henceforth meaning any individual neglecting the safety and prevention rules relating to the pandemic.

But the acronym *covid* does not occupy only the first place in a suitcase word insofar as it can constitute the second forming as in: *MélanCOVID*. This occurrence is formed of « mélancolie » (*melancholy*) and *covid*. The neologism obtained indicates the melancholy caused by the crisis of the pandemic. The syllable [ko] being common to the two formants, has been kept in the middle to serve as a unique link between the two entities similarly to the case for the occurrences above.

Just as the *covid* form has given rise to several suitcase words, the corona lexeme has also participated in the formation of several neologisms ; we cite the following examples:

Coronabdo
Coronapero

The first example in this list is the result of the truncation of the second component forming the suitcase word, namely abdominals, hence the abdo component. The neologism, thus obtained, designates the sports exercises that the confined people practiced during the confinement due to the pandemic. As for the second neologism, it consists of the starting component corona and aperitif, with the phoneme | a | being common to both formants. Neologism is used to designate virtual meetings between acquaintances during the confinement period. Other occurrences are similar to this neological pattern, such as the following examples built around the whatsapp and skype formants respectively:

Whatsapero
Skypero

As in the occurrences studied above, what this neologisms have in common is the sharing of one or two phonemes between the two formants of the word suitcase as in the following example:

Lundimanche (Monday-Sunday)

In this neologism which designates the resemblance between the days during the period of confinement, the two formants « *lundi* » (*Monday*) and « *dimanche* » (*Sunday*) have in common the syllable [di] which, placed in the middle, served as a tool for welding the two lexemes.

However, other neologisms are composed of formants having no phonemes in common such as:

Infodémie (Infodemia)

Hackathon

The first occurrence consists of <info> and <démie>. The latter being none other than the truncated form of the term pandemic or epidemic. Neologism refers to information related to the pandemic in question. As the aforementioned occurrences have already shown, the *covidinfo* clearly states the synonymy relationship between the two occurrences.

As for the last illustration, it designates the internet users' race for computer creativity during the period of confinement, hence the appearance of new applications, new programs and new software. The two components of this example are <hack> and <thon> the truncated form of *marathon*.

3. The trajectory of neologism: from production to fixation

As already shown above, all neologisms are produced by a speaker to name. However, it cannot be retained in the language and access unless it had followed a particular path leading to the fixation and the certification. These two phases are closely linked insofar as an occurrence can only be attested when it is fixed in the language. Fixing is the ultimate step which takes place after the circulation of the new unit and / formula among the speakers. Such circulation is supposed to bring its continual transformations that affect both its content and form. These phases of transformation can follow each other to infinity to eventually lead to the disappearance of the neological form as they can recess at a given stage, become fixed to the form retained in this stage and thus lead to the certificate. Each new form, from production to fixation and certification, is followed by a circulation phase which is supposed to give the neologism in question the necessary notoriety allowing it to access the lexical stock.

Once attested or even fixed, the neological form, in turn, can give rise to other neologisms by combining with other forms within the framework of the telescoping mechanism.

Although the main phases of the journey from neologism to attestation are shared by all neologisms, each occurrence has its own trajectory. A kind of imprint that differs from one neologism to another since each neologism abides extralinguistic factors that characterize the conditions of its first production, the actors involved in its propagation and circulation as well as the continuity or disappearance of the named entity. Indeed, the lifespan of a neologism does not only depend on its propagators (individuals, media ...), it is rather proportional to that of the signified in question. If the latter disappears, the neologism disappears with it and goes out of use. This is what makes the lexical stock in perpetual movement. While some forms are born daily, others age and run out of use.

If the covid-19 neologisms have known a great speed of propagation, it is because they have succeeded in satisfying the needs of the speakers to name objects and / or situations which are new to them ; whereas the lexical stock of which they feature they lacked. Occurrences like *skypéro* or *coronapâques* have been formulated to help a disoriented speaker to deal with the lack of lexicons adapted to this kind of situations.

Conclusion

Neology continues to be the mechanism that generates new lexical forms, thus participating in the dynamism of the language and retaining its status as a living one. Telescoping seems to be the preferred mechanism of modern speakers during the coronavirus pandemic.

After its training and production, the neologism follows its own trajectory. The extent of its circulation in the speech determines the speed of its fixation and consequently of its movement towards the attestation.

Certainly, the neological phenomenon remains at the production and modification phases. Nonetheless, far from being fixed and certified yet, other mechanisms of neology represent a rich field of inquiry for further studies. Added to that, the lexicographic processing methods of the *covid-19* neologisms are to be analysed and scrutinized in depth.

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