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The dynamics of the diffusion of lexical innovations : identity, neologisms and sociolects in the French language context : summary

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SUMMARY

The dynamics of the diffusion of lexical innovations Identity, neologisms and sociolects in the French language context

The present monography aims to outline current research trends of the French language substandard level. The work combines a sociolinguistic perspective with a lexicological one in order to observe not only in what way and how fast lexical innovations are spreading, but also what attitude to lexical innovation the speakers themselves usually take, or what attitude the linguists and the creators of reference dictionaries should take towards neologisms.

Neologisms are observed here as a result of the individual or societal creation that give rise the feeling of newness, strictly subjective but often shared by members of similar age or similar sociocultural background. The promoted new term “identitary neologisms” is define as substandard items in lexicon which can provide the feeling of modernity, of expressivity and, mainly, the sense of group belonging. Their over usage in communication between peers is a feature that allow the researcher not only to capture them quickly it also to notice a frequent polysemic use and semantic instability (or graphic one, in written mode).

The work contains two chapters of the theoretical frame, called Sociolexicology and Sociolinguistics of Innovation and History of lexical innovation in France, followed by five case studies.

The introductory part of the first chapter (pp. 13–38) is conceived interdisciplinarily in order to discuss the concept of temporality in language in terms of philosophy, sociology, classical structuralist linguistics and economics. In the second part of the this chapter (p. 39-80), the so called “sociolinguistics of innovation” is outlined, focusing on Gabriel Tarde’s sociological theory of imitation and

especially on Everett Rogers's economic theory of diffusion of innovation that allows to name the various stages in the dissemination of neologisms and the various types of speakers' behaviour towards them. The debate about the causes of linguistic change, which was very much alive in French linguistics from the mid-nineteenth century to about the mid-twentieth century, is presented in details in this chapter, putting the ideas of classical authors (Darmesteter, Bréal, Meillet, Vendryes, etc.) in the context of relevant period ideas about language (e.g. language as a natural organism), the spread of linguistic changes (wave theory) and the role of society in formation of new lexical items.

A second theoretical chapter entitled History of lexical innovation in France (pp. 81–133) documents the attitudes of French scholars to newly created words from the period of classicism to the 1990s, when important laws were passed to „defend“ the French language. Efforts to regulate the French language and its vocabulary are most pronounced during the period of classicism, fading into the background during the French Revolution, but after an industrial revolution marked by France's retreat from the world stage and a by a distinct fascination with the Anglophone environment, French linguistic protectionism is back on the scene. The French dictionaries of those periods follow those attitudes and lexicographic treatment of the neology give a significant proof of those attitudes' changes in description of the most visible part of linguistic change – the lexicon.

In five case studies, the attention is first driven to the unsystematic conception of expressivity in French dictionaries and its theoretical roots that are analysed in a case study entitled Labelling and Expressiveness in French Lexicography (p. 137–179). On the sample of 50 social symptomatic words, the evolution of expressiveness labelling in *Le Petit Robert* and *Le Petit Larousse* dictionaries is observed over the past 40 years. The label *pop.* (populaire, „folk“) is gradually disappearing in favour of a combination of *fam.* and *arg.* labels that describe the appropriate context of use and sociolectal origins. The transformation into the labelling of expressiveness seems to be linked to a change in sociolinguistic conceptualisation; the lexicographers used to see substandard words as symptomatic of a particular social group, whereas today they see them more as symptomatic of a particular discourse.

A second case study, entitled From Meta-lexicography to Meta-sociolectography and Lexicometry: neology in dictionaries and in the corpus of rap lyrics *RapCor* (pp. 180–209), discuss the question of what criteria French lexicographers use to include a new word in the general vocabulary. The main goal is to show that French dictionaries are still very resistant to the inclusion of neologisms, mainly those coming from stigmatized parts of population.

The third case study, Rap in Sociolexicological Research (pp. 210–243), aims to validate hypotheses on the emergence and diffusion of identity neologisms through sociolinguistic analysis of four items largely used by young French, *bolos*,

sis, *bicrave* and *wers*. The hypothesis of so called “neologism of authority” assumes that with the increase of speaker’s prestige, the probability of the diffusion of his verbal creation increases and this assumption is verified on the texts of rap singers who has big media coverage and on the questionnaires between French students.

In a fourth case study called Circulation of lexical innovation in suburban youth and in rap: a case of territorial appropriation in the Val-de-Marne department (pp. 244–275), it is analysed how youth identity is constructed thanks to the sense of belonging to their territory. On some examples from rap song’ texts, it is shown how such identification occurs in discourse. The official numerical designation of the rapper’s home department often appears, read in numerical order (i.e. 94 as “neuf-quatre”, nine-four).

The last case study, Longitudinal research on the diffusion of neologism *bol(l)os(se)* (pp. 276–311), summarizes a decade of sociolinguistic research, based on series of questionnaires that tested the word’s diffusion and its semantic change among French youth at different times and places. This word could be consider, in the beginning of this research, as an ideal exemple of the category of identity neologisms.