




Authorial Neologisms in Bernardine Evaristo's Novels: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to look into the language of the renowned British author Bernardine Evaristo to find examples of authorial neologisms and writerly words. In the course of the analysis that was carried out, a list of 40 authorial neologisms was compiled out of three novels: “Mr. Loverman”, “Girl, Woman, Other,” and “Soul Tourists”. The mechanism of authorial coinage emulates general linguistic trends of word formation, namely, affixation, conversion, blending and compounding. Authorial linguistic creativity manifests copious imaginative power, technical excellence, and emotional range on par with stylization aimed at describing social contexts and classes. Examining the way characters in the novel use language in different social contexts provides a wealth of information about their social identity: black intellectuals, black artists, gender-fluid people, feminists, gays and bisexuals, Afro-Caribbean people in London, and Londoners with black roots. The random sampling method and contextual and linguistic analysis provided a base for this research.

Keywords: sociolinguistics · neologisms · word formation · identity

1 Introduction

Word-coinage and ways of forming neologisms remain an important part of the study of any language as they showcase the general word-formation rules and patterns of the language. There is another layer that deserves research in connection with new words. An extralinguistic perspective reflects general trends in the life and culture of society. There is an indisputable link of a new word to the time and epoch. The author's neologisms are the product of authorial linguistic creativity and add extra value to the works of the writer. Authorisms or writerly words may throw light on the writer's book and style. Although author's coinages may not stand the test of time as the ones from dystopian novels (*Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley or *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell) they will remain an immanent trait of the author's idiosyncrasy, or individual style, “a structurally unified and internally connected system of means and forms of verbal expression” [1]. The study of the writer's idiosyncrasy pertains both to literature and linguistics. These two domains are intertwined – the writer's style determines literary and language-expressive

means to realize the author's idea. The individual style is tied to the context the writer lives in. Therefore, the style will invariably bear the marks of time and environment.

Bernardine Evaristo is the author of 11 books and 18 plays and short stories, not counting essays and articles. She became known in the 90s and hugely popular in the 2000s. Her novel "Girl, Woman, Other" won the Booker Prize and heralded its author as a mouthpiece for multifarious voices in society. Her writing encapsulates time and space and reveals sensitive issues to the public with a fresh perspective reflecting the vicissitudes of the mood in society, the upcoming trends, and the dominating ideas in the minds of people. The key idea that pieces together all her works is identity or multifariousness of identity. This broad issue has numberless topics to delve into, such as gender and identity, sexuality, race, colorism, and feminism, to name but a few. The writer's ideas are enveloped in an original literary and linguistic form. The language and style are invaluable idiosyncratic features of the British writer with Nigerian roots.

2 Literature Review

The article is aimed at describing types of neologisms in the works of Bernardine Evaristo. The material was analyzed using online dictionaries (Cambridge Dictionary, Macmillan Dictionary, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Word Spy, and Urban Dictionary) that helped illuminate the shadows of meanings of different words related to the substrata of society. Three novels were closely examined and analyzed; they are: "Soul Tourists" [2], "Mr. Loverman" [3], and "Girl, Woman, Other" [4].

Word-formation problem was studied at different times in the works of such scientists as LI; Smirnitsky, Zabotkina V.I.; AI; Feldman, N.I.; Vinogradov, V.V.; Barnhart, G.; Cannon, G.; Fogue, S.; Rot, D.; Odmak, A.; Rey, G. Guilbert and others. The study of new words is called neology. Nowadays, there are a lot of debates as to what to consider a neologism and what its time frame.

The cognitive approach in the sphere of neologisms gives an insight into the interconnection of cognitive structures and linguistic structures. The works of Aitchison J. (1987), Algeo J.A (1995), Anderson J. (1991), Barsalou L.W. (1992), Brugman C, Lakoff G. (1988) are key to understanding the inherent processes of word-formation.

The linguistic analysis of literary works entails the analysis of the individual style of the author. Idiostyle became the subject of extensive and profound research for many scholars beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, namely Ahmanova (1966), Bahtin (1986), Bloch (1948), Bloomfield (1973), Drozdovskij (1972), Fowler (1977), Grigor'ev (1983), Kukhareenko (1974), Larin (1974), Preobrazhenskiy (1991), Shhukin (1984), Vinogradov (1961), Vinokur (1991).

The study of the author's neologisms falls under the realms of literature, linguistics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis.

The topic of language ideology has been on the radar for over two decades (Kroskrity 2000; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998). The basic principles of the analysis through a sociolinguistic lens were taken from "An Introduction to Sociolinguistics" [5] by Janet Holmes, with an emphasis on regional and social dialects; gender and age; ethnicity and social networks; stereotypes; cognition, and culture. Discourse analytical approaches were undertaken to dismantle prejudices and stereotypes as a basis of racism,

disclose speech community identities, and examine the operation of language ideology. The key point is that the way language is used in society is consequent to the social currents at play. Feminist goals, black rights, gender issues, and racial equity are consistent with the dominant ideology in the society where language is part and parcel of the shifts in thinking. A sophisticated account of a differentiated set of structural forms in society was presented by Talcott Parsons in "American Societal Community," where his action theory was fully vindicated. Parsons' analysis may well serve as a turf for the ethnic relations theory along with social pluralism and cultural diversity.

3 Methods and Material

A work of fiction deserves a comprehensive literary analysis that could illuminate the plot, internal and external links, and implicit and explicit ideas the text generates. Such an approach may include an immanent analysis that is aimed at revealing the internal life of the novel — its key elements, inherent labyrinths of thought, the twists and turns of the plot together with its structure.

The primacy of form over material was postulated by R. Jakobson in *Selected Writings*. J. Lotman heralded the other approach that involves the context in the *Analysis of the Poetic Text*. The context is seen as the space that envelopes the discourse and governs it in every respect. Our research moved from form to discourse and context, focusing on the textual keys and lexemes constituting the conceptual place. A conceptual place confines a reader to a particular extralinguistic area that is part of the literary space. A semantic analysis has been used to unravel the layers of a word relevant to understanding the contextual and connotational meanings.

The paper explores the cognitive-informational and pragmatic essence of the new word and its interaction with the discourse in the realm of fiction literature. The new word, like any word, acts as a mediator in the process of communication. Discourse in a literary novel is viewed as the special medium – "language in language" [6]. The cognitive approach, in particular, recognizes that linguistic form is a reflection of cognitive structures and that there are very definite correlations between cognitive structures and linguistic structures. Therefore, the cognitive approach should go hand in hand with lexical and morphological analyses.

The research is based on the material from three of Bernardine Evaristo's novels. Each novel deserves a special place in literature, but what binds the novels is the question of identity, a deep urge to find a place one belongs to, be it a geographical location or a journey to an imaginary past or maybe an introspective pilgrimage to the unknown terrain of one's own being. Chronologically, "Soul Tourists" was published first in 2005. It is a mesmerizing meshing of timeframes, narrative registers, verse, prose, and drama genres. The seemingly simple plot of the will-they-won't-they relationship between Stanley Williams, banker son of Jamaican immigrants, and Jessie O'Donnell, former cabaret singer, at the beginning of the novel, unfolds into a ravishing and nerve-racking adventure in a clapped-out banger called Matilda. It is not only a personal challenge on the path to reinventing oneself and leaving behind the limitations and prejudice of the past, it is also a glimpse into an imaginary past that gives hints at historical perspectives related to race, ethnicity, and identity.

The novel “Mr. Loverman” was published in 2013 and is the seventh book of the famous British writer. This novel is a rip-roaring narration on family, sex, and secrecy. The main character Barrington Jedidiah Walker Esq has long had an undercover gay relationship with his soul mate Morris Courtney de la Roux, and now is torn apart by the dilemma of his life — to succumb to his long-standing passion or to continue his deceitful life with his wife Carmel. As the story pivots around outer restrictions and inner earnings, the thread of the plot unravels into a rounded satisfaction. Characters are given room to change, pains and sorrows are given time to heal, and wants and desires are given ample opportunity to be realized.

“Girl, Woman, Other” (2019) is a bright example showcasing different currents and intersections in the lives of people living in the same city. It is a vibrant story of twelve female characters in the UK over a long time. The story unfolds in its intricate ways with characters connected to each other by blood, friendship, acquaintance or other. At the book’s core are themes that herald the advancement of new discourse – sexuality, politics, racism, feminism, patriarchy, success, gender, and relationships -all molded into one narrative. The intersectionality of the novel brings to the fore the notion of (in)equality and its shades of meaning together with the dubious idea of privilege. The outer constraints intermingle with the inner ones resulting in a radical overhaul of one’s life and stalwart principles. The intersectionality of the novel is realized in the literary text through context, semantic associations, lexical derivation and textual keys.

4 Results and Discussion

The theoretical relation between language, the individual, and the community was postulated by William Labov [7]. The tenet is that it is impossible to understand the speech behavior of an individual without the knowledge of the community to which they belong. W. Labov focused on speech communities, language variation, and communities to demonstrate the intersectionality and crisscrossing of the three constituents. The study of phonological differences was the prerequisite for the deep analysis of speech communities, their status, and diachronic development.

In our research, the Labov’s triad language-the individual-the community is replaced by language-the idiolect/idiostyle-the community as the realm of study is confined to the literary works of one writer/author. The general term of idiolect as “the totality of possible utterances of one speaker at one time in using a language to interact with the other speaker” [8] is often juxtaposed to the notion of idiostyle. According to Bakhtin, the author’s individual style encapsulates an aesthetic perception and the author’s feelings which serve as an instrument for a new artistic reality creation [9]. It is important to note the author’s primacy of cognitive mechanisms and associative semantic fields [10]. In a literary text, thus, the author creates an artistic discourse pertaining to a certain period of time, namely, a linguo-typological variant. This variant includes individual, socio-historical, national, psychological, moral and ethical norms of a certain period, the world perception of a person and knowledge about the world.

Writerly words or authorial neologisms are an amalgam of linguo-creative power of the author, socio-cultural conceptual shifts in society and metalinguistic perspectives. Pragmatic needs dictate the very appearance of a new word. The message’s sender

chooses something from the available lexical repertoire that best expresses his thoughts and feelings. If no such word exists in the sender's lexicon, they modify the old one or create a new lexical unit [11]. As H. Brekle rightly points out, new lexical units are created in the speech process as the speaker implements a certain communicative intention, rather than as units planned in advance by the speaker to expand and replenish the lexicon [12].

Typologically, neologisms are divided into phonological (1) neologisms, (2) borrowings, (3) semantic neologisms and (4) syntactic neologisms (word-formation and collocation) [13]. The latter can be further subdivided into morphological neologisms (word-formation) and phraseological neologisms.

Phonological neologisms represent an ingenious way to coin new words with all the newness and freshness to the reader's ear. These words may contain an important implication of status/group affiliation. For example, the word *wimmin* refers to eye dialect in American English, first used by George Philip Krapp in 1925, meaning "women" with a feminist spelling to avoid the sequence m-e-n. In the novel "Girl, Woman, Other," the word pointed to the exclusive state of the women in the special community called *Spirit Moon* in Oregon in the USA. In the context *wimmin* [4 p. 85] is surrounded by textual keys that the neologism gives rise to — radical feminist, separatist, and lesbian. Thus, there is a pragmatic function of circumscription. Another phonological neologism is *edyat* [3, p. 25] is used in the inner speech of the main character in a self-deprecating way to indicate his personal mental convolutions and inability to speak plain language when it comes to serious matters. The use of phonological and phraseological neologism *wha-go-wan* [3 p. 25] is a vernacular alternative to "what's going on" that has a function of persuasion to channel the conversation in one direction.

Phonological nonce-words have a purely aesthetic function to convey the idiosyncrasy of the moment and to add panache and style to the character's replica. For instance, in "Mr. Loverman" phonological nonce-words *goy-geous*, *mah-vellous*, *gi-normous* [3 p. 15] convey a special case of the main character Barry with which he coins new words and modifies the existing ones to express his wayward and rumbustious nature. These words send us back to the main character's Jamaican origin, enveloping the words with full-bodied rhythm and melody.

Borrowings are distinguished in the text relatively easy due to the foreignness and strangeness of the form. Borrowings that fall out of norms and order in the borrowing language are seen as exoticisms or foreignisms [14]. They preserve the form and to some extent, the sound of the borrowed language and are perceived as foreign. The context and the theme dictate the language the words are borrowed from. Therefore, French is recognized as artistic and eloquent, very usually appropriated by people of arts and letters. In "Girl, Woman, Other" there is a myriad of French foreignisms that are related to the world of literature and theatre: *L'Établissement* [4 p. 415] instead of "Establishment" (a group in a society exercising power and influence over matters of policy, opinion, or taste, and seen as resisting change); *coup de théâtre* [4 p. 410] meaning a successful theatrical production; *tour de force* [4 p. 408] meaning a performance or achievement that has been accomplished or managed with great skill; *Grande entrée* [4 p. 405] or first night; *trés chic* [4 p. 283] or gorgeous; *au coeur* [4 p. 405] or at heart. In "Soul Tourists" there is a French verb *comprenez* [2 p. 82] that is translated as "do you understand" and

sauvage [2 p. 100] instead of savage. All these examples point to an aesthetic function of foreignisms that may embellish a discourse. Functionally, the French equivalents may well be easily replaced with their English counterparts. From the point of view of style, these foreignisms are indispensable to the style the author strives to render.

Another interesting category is where foreignisms participate in word-formation. This process may include word-formation with a foreign component, for example: *à la jet set* [4 p. 283], meaning resembling the rich and successful; *J'accusatory finger* [2 p. 75] meaning "I point my finger in an accusing gesture"; *egalitarianism über alles* (Girl, Woman, Other, 228) that can be translated from German as egalitarianism above all; *outré-eccentric* [3 p. 53]; *whatooterie* [2 p. 85] with French suffix and a fusion of forms (what+a+toot+er+ie). The meaning of the word can be deduced by means of its surroundings: *boulangerie* (bakery), *charcuterie* (cold cooked meats), *whatooterie* (fun and alcohol)

The most important category of neologisms is morphological neologisms, created according to the patterns existing in the linguistic system and from morphemes present in this system. This is a question of word formation, of such regular word-formation processes as affixation, conversion, and word formation, and of less regular ones, such as reduction, lexicalization, etc. Although several new types of word formation appeared in the twentieth century, such as acronyms and telescopies, we can speak of the existence of a traditional taxonomy of word formation. Based on the material, there can be singled out affixal neologisms, compound neologisms, converted neologisms, and reduced neologisms where portmanteau words or telescopic words are most productive as they compress the meaning on the one hand and have an original form and an interesting sound on the other hand.

Affixal neologisms are formed with the help of derivational properties and meanings present in the language. For example, the authorial neologism *deslumber* is formed with the prefix *-de-* [3 p. 20] and meaning "to get out of the slumber mode"; *churchified* is formed with the suffix *-fied-* and means "in a way that is common in church"; *post-mortemize* (to immortalize) is formed by the productive verb suffix *-ize-* and conversion turning adjective into verb. There is quite a productive suffix *-ism-* that spark authorial nonce-words such as: *nakedism* and *soundbitism*. The authorial neologism *conversate* is formed with a suffix *-ate-* that is usually used to form verbs with the meaning "cause to become".

Telescopic words remain the most productive way of forming new words. Telescopic words have become popular in the reduction category, that is, blending two words with different variations: initial, middle or final reductions. For example, *hecture* [3 p. 36] is a portmanteau word consisting of *hector+lecture*; *mendacitude* [3 p. 46] is a blending of *mendacious+magnitude*; *milk-ilicious* (*Soul Tourists*, 57) is a combination of *milk+delicious*.

In general, morphological neologisms differ from phonological and loanwords as holistic signs with a higher degree of disarticulation and motivation and an implicit predicative connection (internal predication) in most of them.

We can say that in English, there is a trend toward an increase in compositional semantic structures. For 40% of all new formations in the last 25 years were dismembered nominative units (derivative and complex).

On the other hand, the growth of multi-component, dismembered units, paradoxically, corresponds to the trend towards rationalization and economy because new multi-component units are the result of the concatenation of collocations, units characterized by a greater degree of dismemberment. In this case, there is a process of universalization, the activity of which has been noted repeatedly.

Structurally, modern morphological neologisms repeat some models that have long been productive in English. However, there is an accumulation of neologisms on the basis of newer models.

5 Conclusion

Authorial coinages overlap with the notion of occasional or potential words. Not all occasional words or nonce-words are bound to become part of the word-stock of a language. The individual situational coinage is a result of word-formation patterns in the course of the creative process. Occasional formations often contain metaphors endowed with emotional, evaluative, and expressive connotations. The more original and exotic a derivative word is, the more it manifests its connotative nature. When the language is used imaginatively, forming new words involves verbal play, resulting in metaphoric derivatives. Playing on words takes place in contexts that justify such originality. The meaning of occasional derivatives is confined to the context, pragmatic orientation, and the purport of the speech event as a whole.

The whole process of word-formation is attributable to the process of lexicalization. Lexical innovations, like neologisms, condense a multi-storied meaning into one word that a whole phrase could otherwise express: "...the word as a lexical element has a concept-defining role" [15, p. 31]. Thus, lexicalization is "the process of 'finding words' for particular sets of semantic features, and has the psychological role of 'packaging' a certain semantic content, so that it can be manipulated syntactically as an undivided unity" [15, p. 180]. Nonce-words gravitate towards semi-productivity or partial productivity, meaning that they are usually formed sporadically by creative processes [16, p. 32]. Individual meanings in authorial neologisms are situation-bound and pragmatically-oriented, with an end to create a special effect. The new word encodes the modality "surprise". As occasionalism or authorial neologisms have their unique place and time within the frames of a literary narrative, they are unlikely to enter the word-stock of the English Language. Still, we shouldn't deny the power of the productive means of word-formation that, together with the contemporary agenda, may forge their way into speech communities related to the themes raised by Bernardine Evaristo.

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