

## NEOLOGISMS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: LANGUAGE AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR SOCIETAL CHANGES

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### Abstract

The multiple transformations that take place in the Western societies during the present century affect various spheres of society such as domestic politics, international relations, economics, gender issues, questions under social policies as attention to disability, environmental concerns, and technological innovations among others. National governments and supranational institutions as United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU), as executive authorities to varying degrees, represent the main agents of social change. But in the emergence of a climate of public opinion favourable to law and policy development different actors with opposing interests come into play: political parties, economic agents, mass media, foundations, social movements, or sectorial associations, that is, a broad range of stakeholders that reflects the pluralism characteristic of democratic societies. At times, this wide spectrum of actors uphold their positions through new terms and expressions, neologisms, which, even if are ignored by national authorities responsible for overseeing languages, may be accepted by the majority of the community. Therefore, language through the coining of neologisms is conceived not only as a mediator between individuals and new realities, but mainly as a tool for social transformation by all actors participating in public arena.

**Purpose** – The aim of this work is to show the evolution of some aspects of Western societies by means of new concepts and terms emerged in Spanish language (and the English equivalents) that, on the one hand, give an account of the abovementioned evolution, and, on the other hand, reflect the coining of neologisms as an instrument of social transformation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Neologisms are analyzed upon the works of different Spanish authors (Cabré Castellví, 2006), (Sarmiento and Vilches, 2007), (Esteban Asensio, 2008) and through the implementation of Greimas' generative

trajectory of meaning (1966, 1973, 1982, 1990) and Lotman's concept of semiosphere (1996). A qualitative approach based on the descriptive analysis of documents elaborated by different Spanish and Anglo-Saxon mass media, political parties, foundations and social movements is implemented.

**Findings** – Scientific and technological developments entail the emergence of new tools and new social practices that can cause changes in the everyday life of a large number of citizens. In such cases the coining of neologisms is indispensable for making reference to the latest advances, and the new terms and expressions take the role of simple mediators between individuals and recent developments. In the case of political discourse, the various players involved in the public life find the creation of words as one among various tools to persuade public opinion and, consequently, neologisms can become agents of social transformation.

**Research limitations** – The research is based on a limited number of neologisms coined in Spanish and English languages since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Practical implications** – The results of this work may contribute to make known relevant social transformations that have occurred in the Spanish-speaking world during the current century. And due to the undertaken comparison between the evolution of Spanish-speaking countries and English-speaking nations through the study of neologisms coined in both languages, the most important practical implication of this paper is the elaboration of a material that could be useful in teaching/learning English and Spanish as second languages for specific purposes. Eventually, this work may be useful for researchers and students from the fields of Semiotics and Political Sciences due to the implementation of Greimas' narrative semiotics and Lotman's semiotics of culture to the study of political discourse.

**Originality/Value** – The originality of this work rests on the interdisciplinarity of a field of study as neology that permits to connect disciplines as Linguistics and Politics in an attempt to provide insights about societal transformations in two areas of the Western World as Spanish and English-speaking countries.

**Keywords:** Neologisms, Societal Transformations, Political Discourse, Narrative Semiotics, Semiotics of Culture.

**Research type:** research paper.