

The Use of Buzzwords in Communication: English and New Linguistic Trends

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Abstract- The article focuses on innovations in communication practice - modern English 'buzzwords', which have become particularly popular during the last five years between 2017 and 2022 and which have been sorted by date of appearance. The author analyses structural and semantic features of the new coinages and identifies: the most common parts of speech and the most productive word-formation types as well as the key topic areas in the field.

Index Terms- neologisms, buzzwords, communication practice, lexical innovations.

I. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the 21st century, which is characterized by the rapid flow of events, the progress of science and technology and emergence of new concepts in different fields of human activity, brings advancements in the development of the Modern English language and communication practice as a whole. Lexical innovations occurring in the vocabulary are due both to linguistic and extra-linguistic causes or a combination of both. Words, to a far greater degree than sounds, grammatical forms, or syntactical arrangements, are subject to change, for the word stock of a language directly and immediately reacts to changes in social life, to whatever happens in the life of the speech community in question. Sometimes a word or a phrase becomes very popular for a period of time through mass media and is known as a 'fashionable neologism' [1, p. 48], or buzzword.

People who work within different industries and environments often develop their own lingo to discuss common business concepts. While people employed in highly specialized industries like technology or medicine use complicated jargon specific to their profession, most people can understand and use business buzzwords to benefit them in any workplace environment.

II. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE

Macmillan English Dictionary defines a buzzword NOUN [C] /'bʌz.wɜːd/ as "a word that has become very popular, especially a word relating to a particular activity or subject". [2] Buzzword is an informal term for a fashionable word or phrase that's often used more to impress or persuade than to inform. Also called a buzz term, buzz phrase, vogue word, and fashion word. The second edition of Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary defines buzzword as "a word or phrase, often sounding authoritative or technical, that is a vogue term in a particular profession, field of study, popular culture, etc."

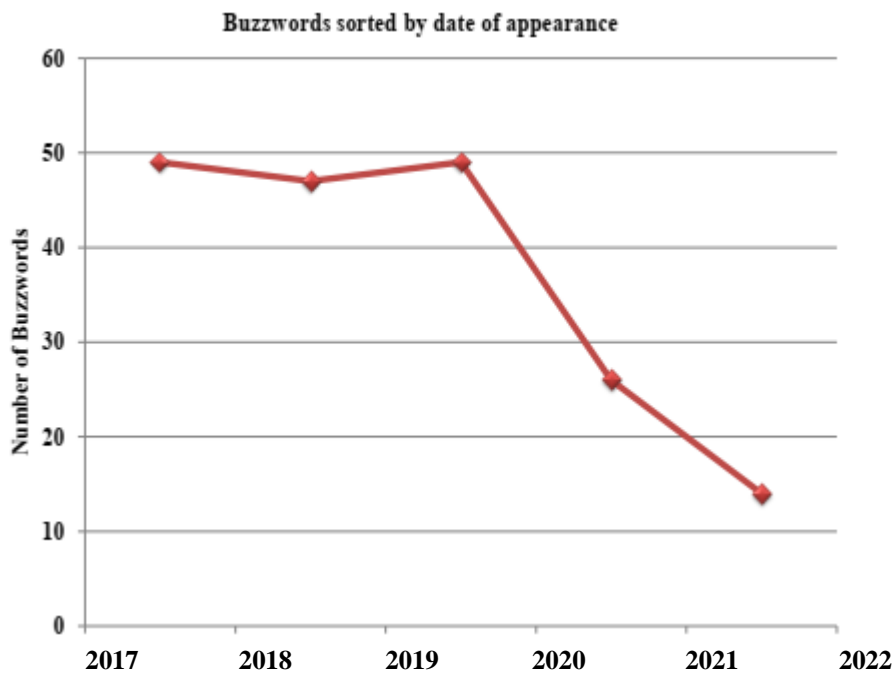
In Communication at a Distance, Kaufer and Carley nicely observe that buzzwords "come under attack with the recognition that a person may be trying to pass off for substance or meat the hum of a buzzword's remote implications." The main objective of the present paper is to provide structural and semantic analysis of buzzwords in Modern English. The linguistic material comprises 185 headwords (282 lexical units), that have appeared during the last five years (2017-2022) and that have been registered on www.macmillandictionary.com (Macmillan Dictionary Online) which is a very reliable source giving a true reflection of English as it is used today.

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines a buzzword (hyphenating the term as buzz-word) as a slogan, or as a fashionable piece of jargon: a chic, fashionable, voguish, trendy word a la mode. It has been asserted that buzzwords do not simply appear; they are created by a group of people working within a business as a means to generate hype. Buzzwords are most closely associated with management and have become the vocabulary that is known as "management speak": Using a pompous or magisterial term, or relating to a particular subject employed to impress those outside of the field of expertise. It could also be called buzz phrase or loaded word. What this means is that when a manager uses a said buzzword, most other people do not hear the meaning, and instead just see it as a buzzword.

However it has been said that buzzwords are almost a "necessary evil" of management, as a way to inspire their team, but also stroke their own egos. With that being said, a buzzword is not necessarily a bad thing, as many disciplines thrive with the introduction of new terms which can be called buzzwords. These can also cross over into pop culture and indeed even into everyday life. With media channels now operating through many media, such as television, radio, print and increasingly digital (especially with the rise of social media), a "buzzword" can catch on and rapidly be adapted through the world.

III. DISCUSSION

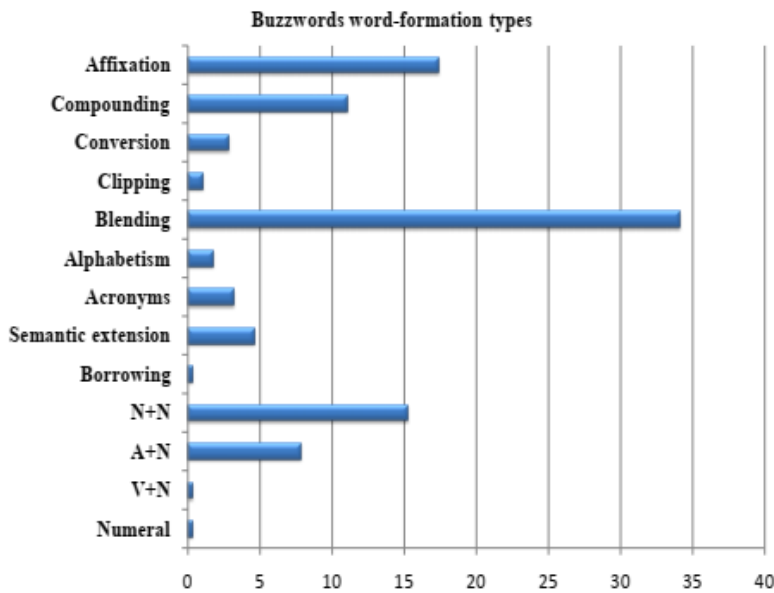
In the first stage of our practical studies of buzzwords we sorted them according to the date of their appearance. The line graph, based on the results of this work, clearly shows that in the year 2017 the number of registered buzzwords constituted 49 vocabulary units. However, this figure dipped slightly in 2018 (47 buzzwords) but recovered again to its former level by 2019. Since then there has been a sharp decline in the number of vocabulary units under consideration by 2020 (26 buzzwords). The following year showed a further decrease to just 14 vocabulary units. Overall, the number of buzzwords that appeared from 2017 to 2022 declined significantly in the last two years.



In the second stage of our practical analysis we sorted all the buzzwords according to their parts of speech. A noteworthy peculiarity of the vocabulary units under consideration is that buzzwords belong only to the notional parts of speech, to be more exact, only to nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs; of these nouns are the most numerous. Out of 282 registered buzzwords 212 (i.e. about three quarters) are nouns and nominal groups; 39 (or 13.8%) are verbs; 29 (10.3%) are adjectives; interestingly, only 2 (or 0.7%) are adverbs.

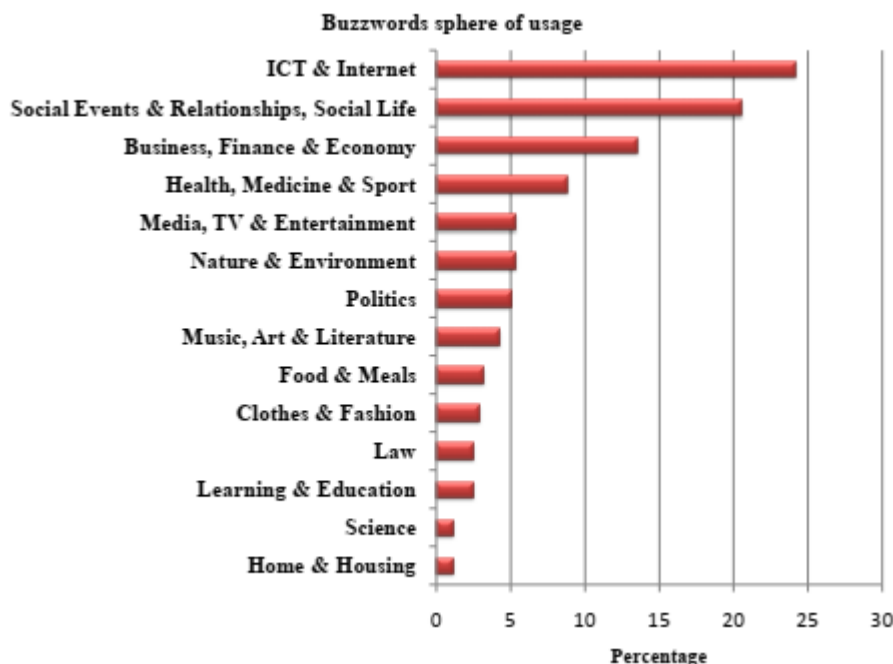
Further analysis showed that buzzwords used as countable nouns (e.g. e-reader) make up the most numerous group (56.6%); predictably, the second largest group includes uncountable forms (e.g. nomophobia) (39.1%). In contrast, buzzwords that can be used both as countable and uncountable (e.g. ecocide) are relatively few in number (only 2.8%); to say nothing of only plural (e.g. mom jeans), only singular (e.g. omnishambles) and collective forms (e.g. squeezed middle) which represent an equal smallest proportion (0.47% each). As far as verbs are concerned the percentage of transitive forms (e.g. to chainwatch) is nearly twice as high as that of intransitive ones (e.g. to medal) (43.6% and 20.6%, respectively). Buzzwords used both as transitive and intransitive verbs (e.g. to troll) make up 35.8%.

In the third stage of our practical analysis, we sorted all the buzzwords according to their word-formation types:



Despite the fact that blending (a type of both shortening and compounding where two or more words are combined together into a new one, removing some parts from one or both words) is considered a non-productive word-formation type, analysis showed that this is the most productive way of forming buzzwords which accounts for one third of all vocabulary units under consideration (e.g. bigorexia, Brexit, Frankenstorm, infobesity, to stuffocate, etc.). Predictably, the second most common word-formation type is affixation (the process of adding one or more affixes to the root morpheme) amounting to about one fifth (17.37%) of buzzwords (e.g. gamification, hipster, selfie, solutionism, supercellular, etc.). Buzzwords formed as word-groups represent the third most common way of enriching the Modern English vocabulary; the bulk of them belongs to the attributive-nominal type built on the N+N formulas (e.g. iceberg home, pheromone party, property porn, sandwich generation, tiger mother, etc.).

In stage four of our practical analysis we sorted all the buzzwords according to their sphere of usage and identified 13 semantic groups:



The analysis showed that buzzwords are extensively used in various fields, of these Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Internet is the most common amounting to almost a quarter of all vocabulary units under consideration (e.g. Bitcoin, cyberloaf, digital wildfire, twintern, webrooming, etc.). One in five buzzwords belong to the so-called ‘Social life’ group (e.g. babytag, uncoupling, crowdbirth, FOMO, Sip and See, etc.), while ‘Business, Finance and Economy’ seen as the origin sphere of buzzwords proved to be only the third amounting to just 13.47% (e.g. crowdfunding, fiscal cliff, sharing economy, solopreneur, zero hours contract, etc.).

Other common spheres of buzzwords usage in the Modern English language are as follows: health, medicine and sport (e.g. hypnobirthing, liquid biopsy, motodoping, paleo diet, text neck, etc.); media, TV and entertainment (e.g. chainwatching, charticle, chillax, media meshing, pre-roll, etc.); nature and environment (e.g. biomimicry, frost quake, rewilding, sandscape, zonkey, etc.); politics (e.g. mic drop, MINT, overvote, push poll, RINO, etc.); music, art and literature (e.g. caxirola, diabolica, flash fiction, photorealism, Zumba, etc.); food and meals (e.g. brinner, duffin, free-from, kimchi, small-plate, etc.); clothes and fashion (e.g. coatigan, onesie, rat tail, shapewear, skeumorphic, etc.); law (e.g. drug driving, jailbreak, spear phishing, etc.); learning and education (e.g. conlang, m-learning, nanodegree, SOLE, vertical tutoring, etc.); science (e.g. exoplanet, Higgs boson, protologism); home and housing (e.g. iceberg home, raingarden, ruburb).

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, buzzwords may not be words you will find in any dictionary, and they are not always brand new terms either. Whatever the reason for their present popularity, buzzwords are innovations that are current and in sudden or increasing use – they might not stay around forever, but it is worth knowing how they are formed and what they mean as well as how they are used in communication practice today.

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