

# THE CONUNDRUM OF TRANSLATING SOCIAL NETWORKING NEOLOGISMS FROM ENGLISH INTO ARABIC A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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## Abstract:

Social networking neologisms are distinctly an intricate aspect facing contemporary translators in their translation journey as newly invented terms and expressions continue to pour in daily. Considering the fact that social networking technologies are by far the most generative sources of neologisms in recent times, the present study is chiefly concerned with the translational chaos these terms have had on the process of crafting Arabic equivalents due to their peculiar aspects. Based on a random corpus, the study purports to investigate instances of loose translations and inadequate equivalents that fell into a dearth of non-technical meanings as a result of a lack of term standardization and other compelling factors. The results were aligned with Newmark's view that neologisms are determinably a current translation challenge.

**Keywords:** translation, neologism, word, formation, equivalence.

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## 1. Introduction:

The fast-paced evolution of technology has paved the way for new words and expressions to flourish; adding hundreds of new words to the lexicon. The freshly invented domains such as IT and social networking, being the outcomes of the great expansion of technologies, have widened the language gap between English and other languages like Arabic, creating a sort of usage disequilibrium. Consequently, translators in the Arab world are in a desperate race to produce adequate equivalents that would keep pace with English growing lexicon, and help enrich Arabic glossaries as well. However, many words seem to be downright faddish and are not ready to be established in common or even in newfangled specialized dictionaries.

Around 5,400 new words are created every year (Bodle,2016), Let alone English lexical innovations in the field of social networking and technology which are sweeping the Arab world, while at the same time creating a breeding ground for chaotic translations from Arab users and translators. This phenomenon can be attributed to the lack of established and standardized equivalents, along with the fact that most Arab netizens (internet users) are albeit under the spell of everything that is English, leaving the use of Arabic equivalents well nigh deserted, however rich and Arabic language might be.

In this study, whose data was collected mostly from the pro-Z huge database (n.d), as well as other web sources, we tried to pick apart newly created words in the social networking industry, after that we tried to divide them according to their word-formation process and their respective translations along with the author's suggested translations and equivalents.

## **2. Definition of neologism:**

The term neologism was first used in 1772 and emanates from the french word; néologisme, which is composed of neo- "new" + Greek logos "word" + -ism. It refers to a "new word or expression". (''Neologism'', n.d)

The emergence of Neologisms has been instrumental in mirroring the development, invention, revolution, evolution, and personal transformation of a language. Newmark (1988) defines neologisms as newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new meaning. Haspelmath (2002), for his part, considers neologisms as new words that are closely associated with the particular requirements and needs they were created for.

## **3. Neologisms and the translation chaos:**

Technology and social networking, in particular, have spawned an enormous and specialized jargon, (McDonald, 2005), enriching the already-voluminous English thesauruses, while juxtaposedly placing the Arabic language in a translational deadlock as newly coined words continue to create a translational perplexity that could amount to a language-translation chaos. This phenomenon is partly due to the non-standardization of neologisms by the academies that still struggle over the appropriateness of their word-formation usage. Furthermore, newly coined social networking words have swiftly entered the mainstream of Arab users who overly voice their linguistic inclination to English faddish neologisms over Arabic equivalents that are; nonetheless well-crafted and widely agreed upon. Worse still, the conundrum of Arabic neologism not only lies in the lack of standardization or the absolute absence of professional translations but also in a dearth of sound interpretation of some set of terms and expressions that can then be loosely translated into Arabic.

## **3. Theoretical Framework:**

A neologism is a word that has always been associated with the novelty and sometimes the peculiarity of a concept either by inventing a new vocabulary item or through redefining a given word to include a new meaning. (Neologism n.d). This means that patterns of word-formation processes are diverse and go hand in hand with the different innovations in the concerned field. Newmark's taxonomy of neologism word formations is one of the most comprehensive taxonomies in which he outlines the possible word creations.

## **4. Word-Formation Processes of Creating Neologisms:**

Many theorists have detailed the processes through which a word formation is conducted insomuch as adjustment, deletions, additions, and even invention are flexible and possible. Newmark (1988) proposes twelve types of neologism broken down into sub-types according to whether they are recognize as new words or already existing words with new meanings. These types are:

#### 4.1 Existing lexical items with new senses:

##### A. Words

Over the years, technological change has greatly contributed to reshaping the linguistic facet adding new meanings to already existing words and becoming trendy and modish. Old words with new meanings seem to be one of the least challenging types of neologisms.

##### For instance:

The word; *Block*

**Then:** “to place a hurdle in front of something, such as a road or path, to prevent that people or things to pass through.” (Dewey.2015).

**Now:** to prevent someone from contacting you on a social network like Twitter, or from viewing your profile. (Dewey.2015).

This word can be trendily translated into Arabic by: حظر

#### 4.2 Collocations

Collocation is a crucial aspect of language. Newmark (1988) portrays grammar as the bones of a text, while collocations as the nerves as they are more specific in denoting meanings. Collocations are often used with another word or phrase that makes up the meaning of the collocation. Existing collocations with new senses, as Newmark states, can conveniently be translated in case of recognized translation. If not, a descriptive equivalent has to be crafted.

**For instance:** thumb culture: ثقافة الشاشة

#### 4.3 New coinages

According to Newmark (1988), New Coinages, as neologisms, are not quite brand new words; as they should be derived from various morphemes so as not to be considered as mere phonaesthetic or synaesthetic words.

**For instance:** ‘Vogue’, ‘Bacardi’, ‘Schweppes’

#### 4.4 Derivation:

The commonest method of crafting a new word is to add a prefix or suffix to an existing one. Newmark stated that myriad neologisms are words derived by analogy from ancient Greek (increasingly) and Latin morphemes which are mostly coined with suffixes such as -ismo, -ismus, -ija, etc.,

Hence realization (1610s), democratize (1798), detonator (1822), preteen (Bodle, 2016),

#### 4.5 Abbreviations:

Abbreviation is a prevalent type of word-formation process whereby new words are coined by shortening a form of a written word or phrase. In order to save space and avoid repetition of long words and phrases, words that are pronounced by their initial letters. Such as:

- ✓ FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation, مكتب التحقيقات الفيدرالي
- ✓ NATO: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization حلف شمال الأطلسي

#### 4.6 Eponyms:

To name something after the name of the person who first produced the object represents an eponym. Bodle (2016) argues that words named after a person or place can encompass a wide range of words: Alzheimer's, diesel, mentor..Etc.

#### 4.7 Phrasal words:

Phrasal words are also the product of word-formation processes through altering verbs into nouns such as:

Work-out, check-out, laid-back, etc.

#### 4.8 Transferred words:

Transferred words, a part and parcel of word-formation processes, are commonly known as borrowings and loanwords. Many words are borrowed and transferred from many foreign languages such as French, Latin, and Greek. Bodle (2016) lists some of the more peculiar sources such as Flemish (hunk), Romany (cushty), Portuguese (fetish), Nahuatl (tomato – via Spanish), Tahitian (tattoo).

#### 4.9 Acronym:

An acronym is a type of abbreviation that is made up of the first letters of each word in the name of something, pronounced as a word. (Cambridge Dictionary n.d)

Acronyms are widely utilized in science and technology as they require a common feature of briefness and aesthetics becoming a feature of every modern language.

#### For instance:

- ✓ Radar: radio detecting and ranging: جهاز رادار
- ✓ LAN: local area network : الشبكة المحلية

#### 4.10 Blending

Blending can be created through a combination of clipping and compounding in which new words are created. (Beliaeva, 2019)

#### For instance:

- ✓ **Netspeak** (n.) = (internet + speak).
- ✓ **Netlish**: internet-english.
- ✓ **Thumbo** (n.) = (thumb + typo).

#### 4. 11 Pseudo – neologisms:

Pseudo-Neologisms are defined as “a generic word that stands in for a specific word.” (Newmark, 1988).

##### For instance:

- ✓ Lab’ refers to ‘laboratory’,
- ✓ Tech’ refers to ‘technician’  
(Sumarni. 2015)

#### 4.12 Internationalism:

Internationalism is a type of neologism that can exist in several languages with roughly the same or at least similar meanings. International words can amount to a loanword that occurs in several languages as a result of borrowings from the source".(Internationalism linguistics n.d).

##### For instance:

- ✓ Computerization: حوسبة
- ✓ Byte : بايت

### 5. Methodology

My initial task was to develop a list of social networking neologisms. I created this list by looking at academic websites; mainly from Pro.Z professional translation website and other online sources. All neologisms spotted in my reading and research were incorporated into my list which includes a total of 15 words.

The study endeavored to probe, exclusively, Instances of misinterpretations and meaningless or loosely translated neologisms alongside the suggested equivalents and translations by the author.

### 6. Findings and analysis:

#### 6.1 collocations:

Table 1

Neologism	Websites’ equivalent	Suggested equivalent
Ego-surfing	البحث عن الذات التصفح الذاتي	التصفح في انجازات الذات ✓
Blue jacking	الإصطياد الأزرق	التصيد النصي البلوتوثي ✓
Thumb generation	جيل الإبهام	جيل الشاشة أو جيل التكنولوجيا ✓

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As table.1 (a) shows, these collocated social media neologisms have somehow been distortedly translated into Arabic. Ego-surfing, for instance, is composed of ego and surfing (on the net) which means searching for one's name (Cambridge Dictionary n.d). The translation: البحث عن الذات does not properly convey the meaning of the source language as it may also have some psychological connotations. Therefore, we opted for a descriptive equivalent: التصفح في إنجازات الذات. Since there is no widely adopted or standardized translation of the expression, the SL word has no equivalent in TL, description is used to describe the SL word.

Bluejacking, which is rather a compound word, means a 'cyber attack that uses Bluetooth to spam one's device with annoying and unwanted messages' (Higgins,2022)

A Literal translation as in: الاصطياد الأزرق is completely unsatisfactory and would lead the reader astray. The process of jacking through sending undesirable messages is quite close to the Arabic expression: التصيد النصي عبر تقنية البلوتوث. The addition of <بلوتوثي> was to enlighten the reader about the device through which the process of jacking is performed.

Thumb generation makes once again another source of translation confusion if not properly considered. The generation born after 1985, which are adolescents and teens hooked on the use of mobile devices such as cell phones. The thumbs are generally used to type (Urban Dictionary, 2008). In the pursuit of an adequate translation, we resorted to modulation as a translation procedure by Vinay and Darbelnet to render the expression into جيل الشاشة أو جيل التكنولوجيا. This translation follows on a similar one: the white man's burden: ثقل الحضارة

## 6.2 blending:

Table 2

Neologism	Websites' equivalents	Suggested equivalent
Netlish	انجليزي الانترنت	انجليزية الدردشة ✓
Gamification	التلعيب	اللوعبة ✓
Screenager	مراهق الشاشة	مراهق ماهر بالحاسوب ✓ متقن العصر الرقمي ✓

Table .2 indicates that blended neologisms are more flexibly made in English than in Arabic, henceforth the difficulty of crafting a targeted Arabic equivalent. As Table 2 shows, the three blended neologisms have once again been rendered in a plausibly inconstruable way in that Arabic equivalents do not quite match the source word nor do they convey a convergent signification.

According to Urban Dictionary; 'Netlish is a blended word, composed of NET and English, and it refers to an abuse of the English Language to make things easier for lazy individuals'. Therefore, translating these blends would require translators to be deeply versed in the social media jargon.

The fact that there are currently no recognized translations for the abovementioned blends would not mean that translators could opt for meaningless literal equivalents. In the case in point, and as the Arabic language lacks standardized translations, we rendered these words in a slightly literal, yet meaningful sense as in: netlish; إنجليزية الدردشة to refer a streamlined English used between lazy teens such as Gn8..etc.

The second word is *Gamification*, which is, as its name implies, a neologism that is composed of game and application, and refers to the fact of introducing certain game mechanisms into myriad industries such as; learning, management, or marketing processes, which are not supposed to be a fun mechanism. In this case, the translator should be aware that the semantic meaning of the word could not be elicited from its morphological structure. Moreover, the word is somehow misleading. The website translator consequently rendered it into; تلعب which is quite similar to the word لوعية. Therefore, the word was translated using the recognized translation procedure when the equivalent of the SL word has been generally accepted. (Newmark, 1988).

As for *screenager*, it is a blended word composed of screen and teenager and refers to teenagers who spend the majority of their time in front of the computer, usually surfing the net. (Urban Dictionary 2003). In some instances, it may also refer to teenagers who are geeks or web geniuses.

In this case, the Arabic equivalent is not present nor is it standardized, therefore a descriptive equivalent is a must:

- ✓ مرهق ماهر بالحاسوب
- ✓ مثقفو العصر الرقمي

*Netizen* is another blend word that is widely used on the net which, according to Urban Dictionary, refers to anyone who uses the internet and becomes a netizen. a "citizen" is a member of a country, while a "netizen" is a member of the internet. Thus, the accurate translation would be; مواطن رقمي

### 6.3 Derivation:

Table 3

Neologism	Websites' equivalents	Suggested equivalents
Unconference	لا مؤتمر غير مؤتمر	✓ مؤتمر غير رسمي
Accumulator	مُجمع/مركم	✓ مُسجِل (حاسوبي)
Transceiver	استقبال	✓ جهاز راديو لاسلكي

Table3 shows that the derived words included were not accurately rendered into Arabic. The translators were not intelligible of the derivational morphology of the word *unconference* along with its prefix *UN* as they rendered it into an incomprehensible Arabic equivalence: لا مؤتمر So, they ended up providing a literal equivalence for SL expressions in the TL.

In this case, the appropriate equivalent should be strictly linked to the acceptable target language structure and has to be comprehensible. An unconference is defined as a meeting driven by participants whereby ideas, reflections, and challenges are enlightened relying on the experience and know-how of their peers. (Unconference, 2024)

So the suggested equivalent would be; مؤتمر غير رسمي as there is no equivalent yet to be recognized.

Lastly, let us take a look at the process that yielded the words accumulator and transceivers. For the word accumulator, it seems to be a polysemous word that has more than one meaning. The confusion lies in the fact that accumulator is a technical word that, according to the closest meaning to computerization, refers to a type of register for short-term, intermediate storage of arithmetic and logic data in a computer's central processing unit. (Rahul Awati n.d)

An accurate translation would be مُسجل rather than مَرَكَم which may otherwise refer to a rechargeable storage battery. As for *transceiver*,

Technology jargon may sometimes have more than one meaning for one word, therefore the Literal translation is not always helping as in the case of the word transceiver that was translated: استقبال which is not as accurate as the borrowed word: (راديو لاسلكي) that entered the language mainstream and has been incorporated in dictionaries years ago.

#### 6.4 Old words with new meanings:

Table 4

Neologism	Websites' equivalents	Suggested equivalents
notebook	حاسوب محمول	✓ حاسوب دفتري
cloud	سحابة الكترونية	✓ تخزين سحابي
Viral	فيروسية الانتشار	✓ انتشر كالنار في الهشيم

Old words that have new meanings are decidedly reshaping the linguistic evolution of the language. The nature of technology and social media usage paved the way for these new words to enter the common parlance. However, for the Arabic equivalence, one can only notice an excessive use of borrowings and loan words as a result of lexical scarcity.

Cloud, specifically "cloud computing", represents the data that a cloud service provider hosts and maintains. Instead of saving files on a storage device or hard drive, a user can put them on cloud, making the files accessible from anywhere, forasmuch as access to the web is provided. (Prajakta Patil & Chiradeep BasuMallick, 2022).

Old words with new senses are usually translated by a functional or descriptive words and equivalents as they are highly technical.

With a slight addition of the modifier تخزين to elicit the overall meaning of the term *Cloud*, the equivalent would be تخزين سحاب as the appropriate rendition. As for viral, it means “that a any piece of content, being a post, video, or image, has gained popularity and is being shared widely on myriad social media networks. (Viral n.d)

The appropriate Arabic equivalent is rendered using an Arabic equivalent by Vinay and Darbelnet’s (1995) equivalence procedure: انتشار كالنار في الهشيم which bears a resemblance to an outbreak of a contagious viral transmission that goes as rapid as an arrow.

Lastly, the word notebook, which has an older meaning known as a book of plain paper or paper with lines, for writing on, but it Has now extended its semantic scope and becomes a reference to personal computers (Cambridge Dictionary,2024). However, there can be a misinterpretation regarding the accurate lexical use of notebooks and laptops: “the most discernible aspect between a laptop and a notebook lies in their size. Notebooks are smaller than laptops. Since laptops are more capable to accommodate larger displays and more demanding programs, they often possess more cutting-edge technologies than notebooks. (What is a laptop vs notebook? n.d)

Therefore, the suggested equivalent for the word *notebook* would be: حاسوب دفتري which can convey a slight connotation to a portable small device as opposed to حاسوب محمول.

### 6.5 New Coinages :

Table 5

Neologism	Websites’ equivalents	Suggested equivalents
Noob	مبتدئ	✓ غر الحواسيب
404	خطأ	✓ جاهل عديم الدراية
Hashtag	هاشتاغ	✓ وسم

The meaning of these peculiar syntactic structures cannot be elicited from the letters that make up the word. Therefore, translators need to be selective in dealing with the scope of utility of these newly invented terms to distinguish them from the ingenious, short-lived ones.

In the abovementioned words from Table 5, *noob*, 404 and *hashtag* are well-known and used widely. For noob, this means: someone who is an apprentice in something, especially using a computer game or a type of software so, initially, a Noob means someone who is a debutant and a computer novice. (Cambridge Dictionary,2024).

However, Noobs are often referred to as n00bs; a sign of disrespect toward them. Therefore the meaning has all the pejorative overtones of that word. (Urban Dictionary, 2024)

Finding an equivalent for the term in Arabic is no walk in the park. As the term is newly invented, there can be no possible transliteration. Since the word is closely linked to computer skills, the suggested translation would be *غر الحواسيب*.

A hash tag is a symbol used on social media to describe the general subject of a Tweet or other post (Cambridge Dictionary n.d). The word is known in Arabic under the term: *وسم* despite the faddish use of a loanword: *هاشتاغ* which represents the influence of the English language even in the case of available equivalents.

Lastly, the term 404 four-oh-four still bears semantic resemblance to the previously dealt with term noob as it means according to the Cambridge dictionary, someone stupid who does not know how to use email and computers. The term originated from computer and software jargon to refer to an HTTP status code. Your computer is requesting data via Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) from a given server upon visiting a web page (Urban Dictionary, 2024).

Therefore, the suggested equivalent should slightly refer to computer illiteracy:

- ✓ أمية رقمية/حاسوبية
- ✓ أمي الرقمنة/الحوسبة

## 7. Discussion:

This study was based on a descriptive approach that aims to accurately and systematically describe the phenomenon under study. The researcher collected data from different web sources such as professional translation websites, theses, and other publications that dealt with the issue of neologisms from English into Arabic.

After sorting the data according to the morphology and word formation of the terms presented in tables, the data was examined by describing the word formation, referring to the translation offered by the relevant websites, and implementing proposed translations and tactics.

The selection of terms was conducted by picking apart fifteen terms that were found to be loosely translated, literally rendered, or that have not been recognized. The results indicated that translating newly invented words in technology and social networking in an extensively evolving industry is not as difficult as translating them.

The majority of websites strategies ranged from literal equivalents to transliteration. This was because some translators tend to give non-technical meaning of the word, thus rendering it without proper consideration of the context. The word noob is the case in point, and was translated into: *مبتدى* which does not quite represent the meaning in context. Some other translations tend to lean on the literal sense of the word without considering the expressiveness and acceptability that serves the receptor of the target language.

Through the present study, we deduced that Collocations and new coinages in the tech industry represented the most difficult terms to render into Arabic due to their technicality, novelty, and freshness. Moreover, users of modern technology may greatly contribute to the use and spreading of

these new terms as they prefer novel and trendy things even if there are well-known, recognized equivalents in Arabic.

## 8. Conclusion

Newly coined words that are poured into the Arabic language through translation are conspicuously a double-edged sword as they can immeasurably enrich the Arabic language, while at the same time eroding its reputation in case of loosely-rendered equivalents. Therefore, the lack of standardized translation of these new and faddish terms in the tech and social networking industry urges professional translators to take up the task of crafting adequate Arabic equivalents that are morphologically and syntactically acceptable.

The task of crafting appropriate equivalents is what Newmark (1988) described as the biggest problem for translators as challenges of translating neologisms could have arisen from the intricate nature of such terms, having to do with a technical and specialized field. Another relevant challenge stems from the variety of word-formation processes of inventing neologisms, especially the terms that fall under the category of new coinages and collocations, etc that even professional translators can be helplessly unable to handle with dexterity

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