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SOCIOCULTURAL FACTORS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEOLOGICAL STOCK OF CONTEMPORARY GERMAN

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Abstract. The contemporary German language is characterized by intensive lexical development driven by social, cultural, technological, political, and economic transformations. One of the most visible manifestations of these processes is the continuous emergence of neologisms, which reflect new realities, concepts, and communicative needs of society. The present study investigates the sociocultural factors influencing the development of the neological stock of contemporary German. The research focuses on the interaction between social change and lexical innovation, examining the mechanisms through which new lexical units enter the language system and become integrated into everyday communication.

The study employs descriptive, structural-semantic, and discourse-analytical methods. Particular attention is paid to neologisms related to digitalization, globalization, environmental awareness, social identity, and political discourse. The analysis demonstrates that sociocultural changes serve as a primary catalyst for lexical innovation and significantly influence the productivity of word-formation patterns in contemporary German. The findings indicate that compounding, derivation, semantic shift, and borrowing remain the most productive mechanisms of neologization. Furthermore, the study reveals that media discourse and digital communication accelerate both the creation and dissemination of new lexical items.

The results contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between language evolution and societal transformation and provide insights into contemporary trends in German lexical development.

Keywords: neologism, contemporary German, sociocultural factors, lexical innovation, word formation, language change, globalization, digital communication.

Introduction. Language is a dynamic system continuously adapting to changes in the social environment. Lexical innovation represents one of the most visible manifestations of linguistic evolution because vocabulary directly reflects transformations occurring within society. The emergence of new words and meanings is closely connected with technological progress, political developments, economic changes, cultural trends, and shifts in social values.

In contemporary German, the process of lexical expansion has intensified considerably during the last three decades. The development of information technologies, globalization, environmental movements, migration processes, and transformations in social identity have generated a significant number of lexical innovations. Consequently, the German lexicon has become a productive field for studying the interaction between language and society.

The concept of neologism occupies a central position in modern lexicology. Neologisms are generally understood as newly created lexical units, new meanings of existing words, or newly borrowed expressions that are perceived by language users as novel elements of the lexical system. According to the extensive studies conducted by the Institute for the German Language (IDS),

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neologisms serve as indicators of social and cultural change and provide valuable insights into contemporary linguistic development [Androutsopoulos 2011: 21; Schlobinski 2006: 29].

The theoretical foundations of contemporary German word formation have been thoroughly described by Fleischer and Barz, who emphasize the role of motivation and lexicalization in the creation of new lexical units [Fleischer, Barz 2012: 13; Bushuy 2025: 17]. Furthermore, they identify word-formation units as fundamental elements of lexical development.

The relevance of the present study is determined by the increasing influence of sociocultural factors on lexical innovation. Contemporary German society experiences rapid transformations associated with digital communication, multicultural interaction, ecological awareness, and changing patterns of social behavior. These processes contribute to the emergence of new lexical items that not only enrich the vocabulary but also reflect changing conceptualizations of reality.

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the principal sociocultural factors that influence the development of the neological stock of contemporary German. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are pursued:

1. To examine theoretical approaches to neologism research in German linguistics.
2. To identify major sociocultural factors contributing to lexical innovation.
3. To analyze productive mechanisms of neologization in contemporary German.
4. To investigate the role of media and digital communication in the dissemination of neologisms.
5. To determine the relationship between sociocultural transformation and lexical change.

The research hypothesis assumes that sociocultural transformations represent the primary driving force behind contemporary German neologization and directly influence both the quantity and the structural characteristics of newly created lexical units.

Literature Review. Research on neologisms has occupied an important place in German linguistics for several decades. The development of neology as a separate branch of lexical studies was motivated by the increasing pace of social change and the corresponding need to document lexical innovation systematically.

One of the most influential contributions to German word-formation studies is the work of Wolfgang Fleischer and Irmhild Barz. Their comprehensive description of German word formation establishes a theoretical framework for understanding lexical innovation and demonstrates the importance of motivational relationships in lexical creation.

Fleischer and Barz argue that word formation constitutes a productive mechanism for expanding the lexicon and that new lexical units emerge through systematic structural processes rather than arbitrary invention. Their classification of word-formation units provides a foundation for analyzing contemporary neologisms.

Another significant contribution was made by Herberg, Kinne, and Steffens, whose dictionary of German neologisms of the 1990s documents approximately 700 lexical innovations and provides extensive evidence for the connection between language change and social transformation. Their research highlights the role of political transition, technological progress, and cultural globalization in lexical development.

Hilke Elsen further expanded the field by examining the forms and functions of neologisms in different varieties of German. According to Elsen, lexical innovation is closely related to communicative needs and social identity construction. New lexical units frequently emerge in response to changing social practices and cultural values.

Contemporary studies conducted by the Institute for the German Language continue to document and analyze neologisms in German media discourse. These studies emphasize that

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neologisms not only designate new phenomena but also reflect ideological and cultural shifts within society.

The relationship between language and society has long been recognized as a fundamental principle of linguistic development. Sociolinguistic theories suggest that language change is influenced by demographic, economic, political, and cultural factors.

Globalization has become one of the most significant drivers of lexical innovation in contemporary German. Increased international communication facilitates the transfer of lexical items across linguistic boundaries, particularly from English into German. As a result, numerous anglicisms have entered German vocabulary and subsequently undergone morphological and semantic adaptation. Examples include *downloaden, liken, Influencer,* and *Streamingdienst*. These lexical items illustrate the integration of global cultural practices into German linguistic reality.

Digitalization represents another major factor influencing lexical change. The rapid expansion of digital technologies has generated an extensive range of new concepts requiring linguistic designation. Terms such as *Homeoffice, Cloudspeicher, Onlineunterricht,* and *digitale Kompetenz* reflect the growing importance of virtual communication and technological infrastructure in everyday life.

Environmental awareness has also contributed significantly to lexical innovation. The increasing prominence of ecological discourse has produced numerous neologisms associated with sustainability, climate protection, and environmental activism. Examples include *Klimakrise, Flugscham, plastikfrei*, and *Energiewende*. Such lexical innovations demonstrate the influence of societal concerns on vocabulary development.

Changes in social identity and diversity have generated another important area of lexical innovation. Discussions surrounding gender, inclusion, and social equality have led to the emergence of terms such as *genderfluid, nichtbinär,* and *Diversitätsmanagement*. These expressions reflect evolving understandings of identity and social participation.

Political developments likewise influence lexical change. Election campaigns, migration debates, international crises, and public health emergencies often generate temporary or permanent lexical innovations. The lexical consequences of political discourse illustrate the close relationship between language and public communication.

Consequently, contemporary German neologization can be understood as a multidimensional process shaped by the interaction of linguistic mechanisms and sociocultural forces. The vocabulary of a language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a repository of collective experience and cultural memory.

Materials and Methods. The present study employs a qualitative and quantitative approach to investigate the influence of sociocultural factors on the development of the neological stock of contemporary German. The research is situated within the framework of modern lexicology, sociolinguistics, and word-formation studies. Particular attention is paid to the interaction between external social factors and internal linguistic mechanisms that contribute to lexical innovation.

The research is based on the assumption that neologisms emerge as a response to changing communicative needs and sociocultural realities. Consequently, the analysis combines linguistic description with sociocultural interpretation in order to identify both the structural characteristics and the social motivations underlying lexical innovation.

The empirical material consists of German neologisms documented in lexicographic and corpus-based sources, including publications of the Institute for the German Language (IDS), dictionaries of German neologisms, media texts, and contemporary public discourse. Particular attention was paid to lexical innovations that emerged from the late 1990s to the present period, as this timeframe corresponds to significant social and technological transformations in German-speaking societies.

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The material includes lexical items associated with: digitalization and information technologies; globalization and international communication; environmental discourse; social identity and diversity; political and economic developments; public health and crisis communication.

Examples include *Homeoffice, Influencer, Klimakrise, Flugscham, Gendersternchen, Fake News, Lockdown, Impfpass, Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie,* and numerous related formations [Bushuy 2023: 22].

Several complementary methods were employed: descriptive method for identifying and classifying neologisms, structural-semantic analysis for examining lexical meaning and semantic development, word-formation analysis for identifying productive derivational patterns, discourse analysis for investigating sociocultural contexts of lexical innovation.

Comparative analysis for identifying similarities and differences among various categories of neologisms.

The combination of these methods allows for a comprehensive examination of the relationship between sociocultural change and lexical development.

Results. The analysis demonstrates that digitalization represents one of the most productive sources of lexical innovation in contemporary German. The rapid expansion of digital technologies has generated numerous new concepts requiring linguistic expression.

Many neologisms originate through borrowing from English. Examples include *Chatbot, Livestream, Influencer, Hashtag,* and *Podcast*. However, these borrowed forms often undergo adaptation to German grammatical and derivational systems. Verbal formations such as *downloaden, googeln, posten,* and *liken* illustrate the integration of foreign lexical material into native morphological structures [Faleyeva 2021: 99].

The productivity of compounding remains particularly significant. German speakers frequently create compounds such as *Cloudspeicher, Onlineplattform, Videokonferenzsystem,* and *Digitalstrategie*. Such formations demonstrate the flexibility of German word formation and its ability to respond rapidly to technological innovation [Keller 2003: 21].

The findings support the view that lexical innovation is strongly influenced by communicative necessity. As new technologies become integrated into everyday life, corresponding lexical units gain widespread acceptance and gradually become part of the standard vocabulary.

Globalization has significantly increased lexical exchange between languages. English serves as the primary source of lexical borrowing in contemporary German due to its dominant role in international business, science, technology, and popular culture.

The study identified several categories of globalization-related neologisms: business terminology (*Start-up, Crowdfunding, Outsourcing*) [Bushuy 2018: 62]; digital communication (*Follower, Content Creator*) [Faleeva 2022: 9]; lifestyle vocabulary (*Work-Life-Balance, Selfcare*) [Schippan 2002: 30]; educational terminology (*E-Learning, Blended Learning*) [Bushuy 2023: 23].

Although these lexical units originate from English, they frequently acquire new semantic nuances within German discourse. This process illustrates how globalization not only transfers lexical forms but also influences conceptual structures and communicative practices.

Environmental issues constitute another major source of lexical innovation. The growing public concern regarding climate change, sustainability, and ecological responsibility has generated a substantial number of neologisms.

Among the most prominent examples are: *Klimakrise; Klimaneutralität; Flugscham; Energiewende; plastikfrei; Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie* [Faleeva 2023: 28].

These lexical innovations reveal how language reflects changing societal priorities. The emergence of ecological terminology corresponds to the increasing significance of environmental issues in public discourse.

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Many of these neologisms demonstrate the productivity of German compounding. Their structural transparency facilitates rapid comprehension and dissemination among language users.

Contemporary discussions concerning gender, inclusion, diversity, and social equality have contributed significantly to lexical innovation.

Examples include: *genderfluid; nichtbinär; Diversitätsmanagement; Gendersternchen; geschlechtergerecht* [Faleeva 2024: 337].

These lexical items indicate changing conceptualizations of social identity. Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as an instrument for negotiating social values and ideological positions.

The study demonstrates that debates surrounding identity often stimulate the creation of competing lexical forms. Consequently, lexical innovation becomes closely associated with broader sociopolitical discussions.

Political developments frequently generate new lexical items that reflect contemporary events and social concerns.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a particularly illustrative example. German public discourse rapidly incorporated numerous neologisms such as: *Lockdown; Abstandsregel; Impfpass; Coronamüdigkeit; Maskenpflicht* [Busse 1987: 41].

Many of these lexical innovations emerged within a relatively short period and spread rapidly through media communication. Some became firmly established within the lexicon, while others gradually declined following the stabilization of the social situation.

This finding demonstrates that lexical innovation often reflects temporary communicative needs. However, certain neologisms remain in use and become permanent components of the language system.

Discussion. The results confirm the hypothesis that sociocultural transformations constitute a major driving force behind the development of the neological stock of contemporary German.

The findings support the theoretical assumptions proposed by Fleischer and Barz concerning the systematic nature of lexical innovation. New lexical units do not emerge randomly; rather, they develop through established word-formation mechanisms that enable speakers to adapt language to new communicative requirements [Böke 1996: 431].

Furthermore, the study confirms observations made by Herberg, Kinne, and Steffens regarding the close relationship between social transformation and lexical change. The emergence of new lexical items reflects broader societal developments and provides valuable evidence of cultural evolution.

One particularly significant finding concerns the role of digital communication. Unlike earlier periods of linguistic development, contemporary neologisms spread through online platforms, social media, and digital news sources. Consequently, the diffusion of lexical innovations occurs more rapidly than in previous decades.

The analysis also demonstrates the continued productivity of traditional German word-formation mechanisms. Although borrowing remains important, especially from English, compounding and derivation continue to dominate lexical innovation. This observation indicates that the German language maintains a strong capacity for endogenous lexical development despite increasing international influences.

Another important observation concerns the ideological dimension of lexical innovation. Many contemporary neologisms are associated with public debates surrounding climate change, diversity, social justice, and political identity. Such lexical units often function not only as designations of new phenomena but also as markers of ideological affiliation and social positioning.

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The findings further suggest that sociocultural factors rarely operate independently. Digitalization, globalization, environmental awareness, and social transformation interact with one another, creating complex conditions for lexical innovation. As a result, contemporary German neologization should be understood as a multidimensional process involving both linguistic and extralinguistic influences.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the study confirms the dynamic relationship between language and society. Vocabulary serves as a particularly sensitive indicator of social change because lexical units directly encode emerging concepts, practices, and experiences.

Conclusion. The present study investigated the sociocultural factors influencing the development of the neological stock of contemporary German. The analysis demonstrated that lexical innovation is closely connected with ongoing transformations in social, cultural, political, and technological spheres.

The findings indicate that digitalization, globalization, environmental awareness, changing social identities, and political developments represent the most significant external factors contributing to contemporary German neologization. These processes generate new communicative needs that stimulate the creation and dissemination of lexical innovations.

The study further revealed that compounding, derivation, borrowing, and semantic extension remain the most productive mechanisms of lexical expansion. Although English continues to exert a substantial influence on German vocabulary, native word-formation patterns preserve a central role in lexical development.

An important conclusion concerns the accelerating impact of digital communication on language change. Online media and social networking platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of new lexical items and contribute to their normalization within everyday communication.

The research confirms that neologisms constitute valuable indicators of sociocultural transformation. Through the analysis of lexical innovation, it becomes possible to identify changing social values, emerging cultural trends, and evolving patterns of communication.

Future research may focus on corpus-based analyses of specific categories of neologisms, comparative studies of lexical innovation across German-speaking countries, and the influence of artificial intelligence on contemporary language development.

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