

As Funny As Neologisms: A Case of 'Friends' TV Series

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Friends Cast

<http://www.tv.com/shows/friends/>

Abstract

Neologism, as one of the most important morphological processes, plays a significant role in the generation of new words. The present paper investigated, categorized and elaborated the humorous neologisms in a popular American comic TV series called *Friends*.

This study showed that neologisms can be interestingly hilarious at times and that they can be creatively used in sitcoms and in everyday language. Findings revealed that many new interesting expressions can be coined within the regular framework of the English language and word formation regulations. This study shows that, contrary to George Yule's opinion (1998), coinages were not only not "the least common process of word formation", but they were frequently used in this TV series. The paper concludes with unveiling the concept of "comic license" in the generation of neologisms.

Keywords: Word Formation, Neologism, Coinage, Morphological Operations, Comic License

Introduction

Productivity or creativity as we know is a morphological phenomenon as the possibility for language users to coin or create unlimited number of new expressions, by using the morphological procedure that lies behind the form-meaning correspondence of

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some known words. The main purpose of creating or coining new words in a language is 'need', we need to create or coin a huge number of new labels and names for everything new that has come into existence in recent times. This 'need' can be naming new things, new ideas fun or creating humor in language also.

Neologism

Neologisms also help to update the existing lexicons and dictionaries of a language. These newly coined words or expressions make a language living and dynamic rather than dead, which show the change in language over the period and the morphological productivity of a language. Neologisms, is basically a combination of two Greek words neo 'new' + logos 'word', which means a newly coined word that may be in the process of entering common use, but has not yet been accepted into mainstream language. Neologisms are often directly attributable to a specific person, publication, period, or event.

According to *Oxford English Dictionary* the term *neologism* was first used in print in 1772, and thus, is arguably a neologism itself. Neologism as a linguistic phenomenon can be seen from different aspects: time (synchronic), geographical, social and communicative. Thus neologism is "...a unit of the lexicon, a word, a word element or phrase, whose meaning, or whose signifier-signified relationship, presupposing an effective function in a specific model of communication, was not previously materialized as a linguistic form in the immediately preceding stage of the lexicon of the language. This novelty, which is observed in relation to a precise and empirical definition of the lexicon, corresponds normally to a specific feeling in speakers. According to the model of the lexicon chosen, the neologism will be perceived as belonging to the language in general or only to one of its special usages; or as belonging to a subject-specific usage which may be specialized or general" (Rey, 1995,77).

A Linguistic Process

Neologisms is a linguistic process, which involves many morphological processes, it can be loan translation (claque), compounding, shortening, hybridization, or affixation etc. Neologisms are defined as "newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense" (Newmark 1988: 140). He points out the types of neologisms: old words with new senses, new coinages, derived words, abbreviations, collocations, eponyms, phrasal words transferred words, acronyms and pseudo neologisms. Aitchison (1991:89) says that their occurrence is justified by three causes: fashion, foreign influence and social need. Wardhaugh (2002:188) says that a new lexicon can be adopted either by utilization of elements already present in the language or by borrowing lexicons from another language. To understand the meaning of a newly created word linguistic competence and general knowledge of the interpreter is important because only with the help of linguistic competence and general knowledge the speaker of a language a person is able to determine whether a term is 'new' or just unknown to him/herself. These newly coined words are common in use according to their usage in a particular situation or context by their users.

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Influence of Neologisms on Society

Neologisms are accepted as parts of the language. Other times, however, they disappear from common use just as readily as they appeared. The most important factor for a neologism to be the part of a language is the acceptance by the public because if the people continuously use a newly coined word it always eventually sheds its status as a neologism and enters the language even over the rejection of its opponents.

After being introduced, a newly coined word has to be verified by the society and language experts who determine its suitability to the concerned language. If a word is not coined according to the word formation rules of the concerned language, it is rejected but proponents of a neologism see it as being useful, and also helping the language to grow and change; often they perceive these words as being a fun and creative way to play with a language.

Crystal (1992) defines Neologisms as the creation of new lexical items as a response to change circumstances in the external world, which achieves some currency within a speech community at a particular time. The newly coined words convey the idea of novelty to a certain extent. New words in the language are constantly entering the lexicon to describe new concepts and technologies and what they mean to us. Conversely, older words continually fall out of use as they decrease in cultural significance.

In order to introduce something new, it needs to be communicated and media plays an important role to introduce these words because neologisms are central for innovation, and media is central for introducing them, T.V shows, movies and news make/spread the new words to us so that the new things can be included in our language.

‘Friends’ TV Series

‘Friends’ is an American sitcom created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman, which aired on NBC from September 22, 1994 to May 6, 2004. The series revolved around a group of friends in Manhattan. The series finale (the 236th episode), airing on May 6, 2004, was watched by 51.1 million American viewers, and was the fourth most watched series finale in television history and the most watched episode of the decade. ‘Friends’ received positive reviews throughout its run, becoming one of the most popular sitcoms of all time. The series won many awards and was nominated for 63 Primetime Emmy Awards. Many critics now regard it as one of the finest shows in television history. The series made a large cultural impact, which continues today.

The humorous nature of this sitcom and creative utilization of language intrigued us into doing some analysis on the coinages and fabrications they employed to make their utterances. The aim might be to examine the potentials of the English language in generation of new words and expressions and introducing strategies to make them.

Methodology

Materials:

Materials of this study were extracted from 50 randomly selected episodes of an American comic TV series called *Friends* (1998-2004). Each episode was about 20 minutes and with an English subtitle.

Procedures:

Each episode was examined carefully in search of the neologisms and odd self-fabricated expressions. The detected items were classified into several categories observed. Then, the expressions were elaborated based on the context of the situations and the morphological processes involved in each expression.

Data Analysis and Results

Each episode was examined carefully and the newly fabricated expressions and neologisms were extracted. Analysis of the corpus showed that many of the fabricated expressions were consistent to the English word formation process rules. However, they were used in a funny trend that would invoke laughter. The fabricated expressions were categorized as following items:

Modifier + Noun

The most common formula of the word generation, as was observed in the corpus, was the combination of two nouns, which the first noun would act as a modifier. Below are some examples which follow this formula:

- *“Hello, mother kisser.”*

This expression was used when a character kisses the speaker's mother and this is how he reacts towards him. As it can be seen, combination of two nouns led to a new funny expression that its resemblance to a famous word of profanity adds to its humor sense.

- *“Did you use to work in a jerk department?”*

This is another sample of a funny expression. This was used by the speaker to address a coworker to whom she had no interest.

- *“Yeah I know him ... the guy with a face ass.”*

As can be seen in this example, another combination of nouns plus the productive power of creativity made the speaker to use this expression to mock someone for a chin dimple.

Other Examples: turtle man, dinosaur guy, wine guy, nothing guy, butt guy, sperm guy, coma guy, nurse man, weather bitch, dinosaur twins, love muffin, belly time, idea time,

pig man, penis embargo, bug lady, man nipples, ball boys, homosexual hair, woman repeller, greeter girl

Use of Common English Affixes to Generate New Words

One of the interesting features of the newly fabricated expressions in this sitcom was to make use of the linguistic properties of the English language in word formation. Findings showed many interesting nouns, adjectives, etc. that were fabricated were consistent with the regular English affix frameworks. Below are mentioned some examples:

- *“I wasn’t the kisser ... I was the kissee.”*

The speaker in this sentence has used the English suffix “ee” to justify that he was not doer of an action but rather was subject to an action. Although kiss is not followed by suffix “ee” in English, the comic genre of the context issues a permit to such new words be created.

- *“Uh ... She is so manish.”*

This is the reaction of the speaker when he encountered a woman who was wearing like a man and had men’s haircut. He used the suffix “ish” which is indicative of some characteristics. It is also reminiscent of words like childish, etc. This shows the speaker tried to make his new expression within a framework.

- *“Oh yeah, then everybody call me Ross, the divorcer.”*

In this example, the speaker uses the English suffix “er” to create a new English word that appears to be allowed in the English language.

Other Examples: “You are so agist.” (biased about age), “Oh you re-love her.” (have feeling for someone after breaking up), “Messers become the messee.” (someone who messes up with others and someone who is messed up with), “Are you un-supporting me again?”, “You should be gossipless!”, “Is there anything unmarriageable about me?”, “foodal chockage”, “This is so un-me.”, “You like something more toothier?”

Hyphenated Expressions

One of the interesting methods of word generation that was spotted in this comic TV series was the use of many hyphenated expressions. Most of these expressions were used to be nouns or adjectives and were actually combinations of several words. In the examples below, some of these expressions are mentioned:

- *“They still hate you. They think you are a Mr. I m-one-of-you boss.”*

In this example, the speaker tries to paint a picture of a boss who tries to show that he is friendly with his staff. As can be seen, the hyphenated expression is used as a modifier to the word *boss*.

- *“Hello Mr. back-from-the-orient.”*

In this example, the speaker greets a friend who has just returned from China. In this extract, the hyphenated expression serves as a noun.

- ***“I don’t really like to bring up pain-in-the-ass-stuff.”***

In a similar vein, the speaker uses a hyphenated expression which serves as a noun meaning causing a good mood to be spoiled.

Other Examples: *“Mr. I wanna-be-your-buddy.”*, *“Man-child”*, *“You should go to a quit-being-a-baby-and-leave-me-alone clinic.”*, *“It’s a get-rid-of-anything-Rachel-ever-touched sale.”*, *“Mr. right-place-at-the-right-time.”*, *“I know I kinda sprung this me-moving-out-on-you thing.”*, *“Who is educated now? Mr. I-forgot-ten-states!”*, *“He’s a Must-Mock Joey.”*

Blending

Another strategy that was spotted in this TV series was blending two words and producing a new one. Below some examples are mentioned:

- ***“Stop it, please. You’re Monican not Monican’t.”***

In this example, the speaker in a desperate attempt tries to encourage Monica to cheer up. She uses her name plus can and can’t to create new words.

- ***“I just came by to have a Monicuddle.”***

In this example, Monica’s father barges in and uses this sentence which is a combination of her name and the word *cuddle*.

- ***“Oh, that was a mustartastrophe.”***

In this example, the speaker, in a very creative manner, blends the first part of the word *mustard* and the last part of the word *catastrophe* to refer to a situation when a jar of mustard is emptied on the table cloth.

Other Examples: *Chanberries* (Chandler+Berries), *Happy Plane-a-versary!* (Plane+Anniversary), *Manny* (Man+Nanny), *Chandlove* (Chandler+Love), *Frienaissance* (Friend+Renaissance)

Use of Proper Nouns

Another interesting word formation technique that was used in this TV series was to make use of proper nouns within the grammatical rules of English.

- ***“It’s his innate Alanness that we love.”***

In this example, the speaker uses a proper noun and adds the English “ness” suffix to indicate the personal characteristics of Alan.

- ***“Let’s Ross it.”***

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In this example, the speaker uses a proper noun as a verb to indicate an action that Ross is very good at doing.

- ***“I made it just in case you pulled a Monica.”***

In this example, the speaker uses a proper noun to coin an expression indicating Monica's failure in cooking a dish.

Other Examples: *“That's a lot of Monica.”, “Don't be Monica about it.”, “Sometimes he is too Alan.”, “You should be anti-Paolo.”, “Don't do anything Joey-like”.*

Making Verbs

Verbalizations were also spotted in the corpus under study. In these phenomena, nouns, adjectives, etc. would turn into verbs. Below some examples are mentioned:

- ***“Dinner is going to be great... In your face last year me.”***

In this example, the speaker coins a new verb to ask her friends to remember her failure in last year's Thanksgiving party and compare it with the Thanksgiving party in which everything is great.

- ***“Turkey is turking ... yams are yaming.”***

In these examples, the speaker tries to enliven her dish by verbalizing Turkey and Yam and adding “ing” to them. Although, they do not have any meaning, it shows the potentials of this language to undergo odd grammatical variations.

- ***“Alright! French it up!”***

In this example, the speaker verbalizes “French” to ask a person to speak French. In this case, the speaker has coined a separable verb.

Other Examples: *“What are you middle naming me for?”, “Let's Ross it.”*

Imitative Patterns

An interesting phenomenon that was observed in the corpus was the exploitation of some imitative funny patterns used in the English language. These expressions remind the listeners of some similar existing expressions. Some examples are mentioned below:

- ***“Keep your panties on!”***

Using the pattern of the idiom “keep your shirt on”, the speaker voiced this expression to humorously ask her friend to “be patient”. The speaker used this expression to refer to his tasteless memory of being caught with women's underwear in a public place.

- ***“Oh! Bitch of a commute!”***

Replacing the emphatic word “hell” with “bitch”, the speaker refers to a *woman* who finds herself in a constant tiring commute to her work.

- ***“I am not a kiss-and-tell but I am not also a sex-and-shut up.”***

In a very creative trend, the speaker tries to voice the contrary side of the expression “kiss-and-tell” by coining an imitative “sex-and-shut up” to build grounds for telling his own story of love affair.

Other Examples: “*We`re gonna be friends-in-law.”*, “*We called ourselves the three basketeers.”*”

Use of Suffixes Like “O”, “Y”, and “E”

Utilization of some irregular suffixes was the other strategy by which the speakers used to generate words. Suffixes like “o”, “y”, and “e” was frequently used and below some examples are mentioned:

- ***“You get away from me... you sick sick sicko!”***
- ***“Would you stop it, kiddy?”***
- ***“You`re hurting me, kickie!”***

These morphemes are not usually inflectional. In other words they seem not to be able to change the grammatical function of the words, yet are used to add emphasis to some particular concept.

Other Examples: *Thanksgivingy, Weddingy, Kiddo, Weirdo, Dr. Skeptismo, Mr. Kissy, Missy, Fatty*

Use of Fabricated Nonsensical Words or Expressions

Some expressions were also detected that do not possess any dictionary meaning and they do not follow any regulation of word formation, yet they are the products of the speakers mind and can be understood only by referring to the context of situation. Some of these types of fabricated words or expressions are mentioned below:

- ***“Well, it needs to be plicit.”***

The speaker uses a word which cannot be found in any dictionary and does not have any meaning unless we refer to its context when he uses this sentence in response to “*It could be implicit*” of his sister. This shows the speaker mean to say *explicit* in a way to put emphasis on the word. We cannot help but notice that the speaker the speaker omitted the prefix “im” under the influence of its function which is used to make negative English nouns.

- ***“I don`t even have a pla.”***

The speaker uses this word in response to her friend's "Do you have a plan?" to emphasize on her absolute hopelessness. As can be seen there is absolutely no way to figure out the meaning without referring to the immediate context.

- "*Everything is flupie!*"

The speaker coins this word to indicate that everything is out of order and nothing goes well in a situation. Again the context of situation aids the reader to find out the meaning of this fabricated word.

Miscellaneous Methods of Generating New Words or Expressions

This popular comedy never ceased to put a limit on its word generating machine. Various instances of creative uses of producing new expressions can draw attentions towards the potentials of the English language in word formation capabilities and techniques. The following strategies were also used in the conversations of main characters of this TV series, however, they were less frequent than the abovementioned strategies.

A. The use of intensifier "so" before a verb or a noun than an adjective to put emphasis on a concept.

- ✓ *You are so wearing that bracelet!*
- ✓ *You are so doing this out of spite!*
- ✓ *You are so dad!*

B. The use of suffix "wise" for some words that are less likely to take it in ordinary speech.

- ✓ *It was a bad day, whore-wise. (a reaction when someone was mistaken to be a whore)*
- ✓ *That's nice, weather-wise.*
- ✓ *I have a question, meat-wise.*

C. The use of words in total new senses.

- ✓ *Misters (someone's genitals)*
- ✓ *Royal Subjects (in almost the same sense)*
- ✓ *That's moo point! (meant to be "nonsense" as a cow's sound)*

D. The use of several separate words to produce uncommon comic expressions.

- ✓ *Dear Baby Adoption Decider People. (an introduction to a formal letter)*
- ✓ *Happy Meatless Turkey Murder Day! (response of a vegetarian to the expression happy thanksgiving)*
- ✓ *You can be on the Olympic Standing There Team. (in response to the idleness of someone)*

E. The use of paradoxical expressions.

- ✓ *Mr. Pizza Delivery Girl (a reaction when seeing a girl with boy's haircut)*
- ✓ *I thought you are Joey man/woman!(a reaction when seeing a boy who uses make-up)*

✓ *You should get the best bad massage award.*

Conclusion

Language has always been susceptible to changes and creativities that bear on it during its existence. TV programs, movies, and other audiovisual feeds have a significant role in the propagation of the media discourse in people`s lives. In this study, we examined one of the most popular sitcoms of the world in terms of the application of neologisms or newly fabricated expressions. A considerable corpus of this TV series was analyzed and the fabricated expressions were detected and morphologically categorized. Observations showed that characters of this TV series coined many funny expressions within the framework of English word formation processes. They combined the odd instances of language use with rules of the English language to “humorize” their speech. Based on the findings, we can claim that the English language has enough potential to embrace the new creativities in the word formation domain. There were, however, instances in which the common regulations of English were breached which were convincing enough to be addressed as the *comic license* by which the comic discourse could further is goals. These fabrications that are thoroughly disseminated by media can get into people`s daily speech and bring about considerable changes in a language.

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