

The shifting shapes of meaning – A study of morpho-syntactic changes of neosememes in German

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Although most of nowadays neologism research explores corpus linguistic methods to detect new words, the number of automatically detected new word senses still tends to be small when compared to the number of entries in the dictionary (Klosa & Längen 2018). Due to their rather opaque definition, with word sense divergences ranging from subsenses to entirely new meanings of a formative (a.o. Schippan 1992, Kinne 1996, al-Wadi 2005), the computational detection of new word senses proves to be a tricky task.

Grammatical features of neosememes (neologisms considered to be new meaning attached to a formative) are rarely explored regarding their statistical significance, even though a considerable amount of German neosememes can be distinguished from other word senses by morphosyntactic changes. The already polysemous *abhängen*, for instance, – coined as a neosememe in youth language with the meaning ‚to hang out, do idle things‘ – does not only frequently cooccur in prepositional phrases with *mit* (‚with X‘), but emerged as an intransitive form that calls for an animate subject: ‚*Ich häng‘ da gern ab*‘ (‚I like to hang out there‘), separating the neosememe from other senses of the formative (e.g. a. ‚the process of meat aging‘, b. ‚to depend on something‘, c. ‚to take something down‘, d. ‚to leave someone behind‘).

The goal of this research is to investigate whether the emergence of new word senses in German involves statistically relevant changes of morphosyntactic features and whether some of those surface features might count for additional measures for corpus-based semi-automatic detection methods.

For the present study, lists of neologisms classified as neosememes were compiled from the NWB (Neologismenwörterbuch) and analysed in detail in order to evaluate the degree of semantic overlap between new word senses and their formative’s root sense. A distinction was made between neosememes that originated from German (*texten*, ‘to text (messages)’) and foreign-based neosememes (*das Date* with the competing senses ‘romantic meeting’ and ‘romantic interest’), ensuring the consideration of differences in the lexicalization process that might interfere with the classification of new word senses (e.g. Schippan 1992, Steffens 2017). In a second step, the neosememes were classified according to changes of their formative’s morphosyntactic features and are currently being analysed regarding overall frequencies in the corpus.

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