

# Neologisms: Their Emergence, Formation & Usage

## 英语新词的 产生、构成和用法

广东省出版集团

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**Neologisms:**

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**英语新词的  
产生、构成和用法**

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## 编者的话

众所周知，世界上的万物无一不是处在不断变化的动态之中，语言也不例外。20 世纪 40 年代在英语世界享有盛名的语言学家，威尔士人阿瑟·劳埃德·詹姆斯 (Arthur Lloyd James) 曾写过一句名言：“语言从来都不是处在一种固定不变的状态之中，它是在不断地变化着；我们所看到的变化不是幻灯片而是电影。” (Language is never in a state of fixation, but is always changing; we are not looking at a lantern slide, but at a moving picture.) 把动态中的语言比作活动的电影，言简意赅，深入人心。

社会、政治、科技的迅速发展对当代国际交往中使用最广的语言——英语所产生的影响是相当巨大的。英语新词层出不穷，令人目不暇接，给我国英语学习者造成了一定的困难，因此有必要对其产生、构成和用法进行分析阐述，以帮助大家了解英语新词产生的因素、发展的现状和趋势、新词构成的特征和方法以及新词新语的使用语境，以便更好地掌握其用法。这正是编辑出版此书的目的所在。

新词汇到底是怎样产生的？当人们发现新事物，遇到新问题，总结了新经验，发展新思想的时候，便需要新字和新词表达；每当某一门科学发展到一个新阶段，就有相当大的一批新词涌现。二战以后，特别是 20 世纪 80 年代以来，据《巴恩哈特词典伴侣》杂志统计，每年进入其计算机数据库的新词就达 1500—1600 个，这一递增速度是相当惊人的。在目前科学和技术日益进步的社会里，科学技术是新词汇的主要供应者，很多鲜为外行人所知晓的科技词汇，其中有不少常被应用和引用，结果成了一般人所喜闻乐道的用语。大量新词汇的涌现使英语的表达力加强了，形式丰富了，更趋生活化了。

新词通常通过什么方式或途径产生的？传统的词汇学已对英语的构词法进行过详尽的阐述。《二十世纪词汇》(20<sup>th</sup> Century Words) 的作者约翰·阿伊托 (John Ayto) 在该词典的前言中对英语新词的构词总结了五种途径，他说：“There are fundamentally five ways in which neologisms are created: by putting existing words to new uses; by combining existing words or word - parts; by shortening existing words; by borrowing words from other languages; and by coining words out of nothing.” 约翰·阿伊托摆脱前人之窠臼，把需要用笔墨繁芜阐述的英语新词之构成途径归纳得如此通俗易懂，凝练贴切，实在是灵犀在心，匠心独运。

约翰·阿伊托对英语新词构词法的这一归纳使我们歆慕不已。这也是我们编写本书时的主要依据。

《英语新词的产生、构成和用法》全书分为三章，重点第三章又分为5大节12条。从宏观到微观纵横全面揭示了英语新词的最新变化。第一章回答了“新词是什么？”的概念问题，使读者对新词有一个动态的、纵横对比的全新认识；第二章从社会发展尤其是科学技术进步的视角追述了产生新词的动因；第三章为本书重点，主要根据约翰·阿伊托的观点以大量的词例用法详细阐述了英语新词构成的方式或途径：1. 旧词新义法。主要指(1)词汇意义的变化——通过词的兴与衰、功能转换、词义自相矛盾、小词多义方式；(2)词类的改变。2. 旧词结合法。主要介绍了(1)复合法——通过保留原义、赋予新含义、名词短语的语音变化方式；(2)并列串生法；(3)混成法；(4)拼缀法；(5)发音偶生法；(6)重叠法。3. 简略法。主要有(1)复合词、名词短语和动词短语简略法；(2)截略法；(3)逆生法；(4)缩写法——通过首字母拼写和首字母拼读方式。4. 外来语借用法。5. 凭空臆造法。

本书最大特点是以情景对话形式揭示英语新词的生成和使用语境，让中国的英语学习者自然而然地了解新词和用法，并能够跨越中西文化障碍达到得体使用新词的目的。对话语言力求表达生动，地道上口。贯穿全书的184例英语对话将论及的语言现象置于形象具体的语用情景中，为读者提供了生动自然、幽默诙谐且极具实用价值的语言应用范例。所有的新词用法来自于现实社会生活、书刊、杂志、广播、电视及英语本族语者的街谈巷议。英语全部对话都配有中文参考译文，以供读者参阅。

为了保证英文的质量，书稿完成后交给了我们的恩师俞杰教授进行审定。先生20年前离休后移居澳大利亚，他虽已耄耋之年，视力极差，但精神矍铄，思维依然敏捷。他不辞辛苦地逐字逐句对书稿进行了审阅，做了必要的修改，有些对话成段进行了改写，为了保证对话地道上口，他还逐一读给他的澳洲朋友们过耳，并接受了他们的意见做了必要的改动。

因此，这本书实际上是我们师生通力合作的成果。

中国人写英文，不地道之处甚至错误在此难免，欢迎读者朋友们指正。

编者

2010年10月15日

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## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS A NEOLOGISM ?

Now that we plan to engage on the study of neologisms we will have a number of questions, perhaps the one that needs to be answered in the first place being: what exactly is a neologism? First and foremost, neologism itself is a mongrel word, a word of two languages in origin. “Neo” comes from Greek and “Logism” from Latin. “Neo” means new and “Logism” means word or expression. And so, a neologism is a new word or expression or an old word or expression that has been pressed into service with altered meanings. The italicized words and expressions in the following sentences fall into this category.

- There is going to be a Shandong *Derby* in Qingdao next Sunday afternoon.
- 下星期天下午在青岛要举行一场山东两个队的 德比大赛。
- He has got no originality— he is just a Huang Zhou *clone*.
- 他缺乏独创性—不过是黄舟的 仿效者。
- Do you have some *do-re-mi* you could loan me?
- 你能借给我一些 钱吗?
- This car isn't exactly a *steal* but it's still a good value.
- 这辆车算不上 太便宜, 但还是很划算。
- If you *Tom* it like that, they will walk over you.
- 你如果如此 逆来顺受, 他们会往你头上拉屎撒尿。
- It's not good only to do *desk work* here.
- 只在这儿 纸上谈兵 是无济于事的。
- Isn't it a waste of wood to popularize *disposable chopsticks* in China?
- 在中国广泛使用 一次性筷子 会不会对木材造成浪费?
- Let's withdraw some money from an *ATM* just around the corner.
- 我们就从附近的 取款机 上取点钱吧。
- I can lick the garden into shape *asap*, I promise.
- 我答应, 我会 尽快把花园收拾得干干净净。
- He's contracted nothing but *affluenza*.
- 他只不过得了 富贵病。



We have come across ten neologisms in the above ten sentences. “Derby” is a freely coined new word, which has become so popular in the sports circles the world over that our Chinese soccer fans have already borrowed it into our language by way of sound translation. Hence the Chinese equivalent “德比”. In soccer and other sports it is used to refer to a match between two teams based in the same area. “Clone” is a new word which emerged with the development of botanical technology. It is now used to refer to an animal or plant that has been produced artificially in a lab from the cells of another animal or plant. In the year 1959, the word began to be used as a verb, meaning “to cause to reproduce so as to form a clone”. e. g. “One of the most extraordinary of the possibilities now being explored...is referred to as cloning people—the creation of genetically identical individuals from body cells” (*20th Century Words* p. 330). The word was first explained as “something produced nonsexually” (无性繁殖), and now we find it more convenient to give it a sound translation (克隆). In our sample sentence above it is used metaphorically to mean “a person who seems to be a copy of someone else” (某人的翻版). The American slang word “do-re-mi” is closely connected with “dough” which has long been used informally to refer to money. We cannot but feel amused to ponder why some Americans started using the funny word “do-re-mi” instead of “dough” in the 1920s. Although it is still regarded by some people, those who are strongly opposed to the so-called barbarism in particular, as an inadvisable informal slang word, yet more often than not we hear it fall from the lips of youngsters in the English speaking world as a whole.

The word “steal” is a familiar word. It becomes a new word simply because it has acquired a new meaning “a good bargain” (便宜极了).

I call the expression “Tom it” a new expression simply because it is formed in accordance with the structure “n. + ambiguous it” which has made a reappearance after becoming oblivious for quite a long time. This structure was quite the vogue in Shakespeare’s times and the small word “it” used in this way has been termed by grammarians as “ambiguous it” or “sham object”. “Tom it” now means “to resign oneself to unreasonable treatment” (逆来顺受). We will come across more examples like this in the following chapters.

The compound “desk study” does by no manner of means indicate “the study at a desk”. Its connotation of “being an arm-chair strategist” (纸上谈兵) cannot keep us long guessing.

“Disposable chopsticks” is also a new noun phrase simply because we Chinese people started using them only several tens of years ago.

“ATM” is an initialism and the three capital letters stand for “automatic teller machine”. Its history is no more than half a century. In our country ATMs have not yet spread far and wide.

“Asap”, a new acronym which was and is still sometimes written as “ASAP” or “A. S. A. P”, was formed from the initial letters of “as soon as possible”. It varies with ATM in that it can be pronounced as a common word.

The word “affluenza” may strike us as rather odd at first sight. It is a new blend originating from the contraction of two existing words: affluence + influenza. It is used to refer to “the disease of being too rich”.

We have already made an acquaintance, a nodding acquaintance of course, with the word “neologism” by dealing tentatively with the above ten words and expressions. Obviously ten words and expressions are but a drop in the ocean.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the English language has acquired a special global status. Following Greek, Latin and French, which all have played an exceedingly important role as a means of communication on an international scale at different times in human history, English has now taken the place of them all and become the universally received globish (global language) for today.

At a rough estimate, there are about 1.5 billion speakers of English in the world at the present time. This number includes 400 million native speakers of English, 350 million official language speakers of English and approximately 750 million foreign language speakers of English. What is especially noteworthy is that this number is certainly on the increase as time goes on. Given this enormous number of speakers of English, it would be unimaginable if English didn't have the largest vocabulary of all the 2796 languages spoken by people in the world today.

English and our mother tongue, Chinese are the two of the most important languages in the world. Roughly 58000 characters have ever been used throughout our long history. Nowadays, some 10000 are still in current use with the rest becoming archaic. Our newspapers work with about 6000 Chinese characters. However, people, including native speakers of English, cannot but panic while being asked about the exact total number of words in the English language that have been used ever since the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians started to settle down and procreate in the British Isles in the 5th century.

Being a mongrel language, English must have had a sea of words. It's a sure thing that in its course of development quite a number of words, having

been freely coined on the inspiration of a moment, were ephemeral, shining in an instant like comets and disappearing into thin air all of a sudden. Quite a number of others, though they might have had a comparatively longer life, were not popular enough to find their way into dictionaries. No reliable statistics are available as to the total number of words that have ever been used throughout the more than one thousand years of history of the English language, the current globish for today.

Julian Burnside, an Australian barrister and philologist of mark says in his book *Word Watching* (p. 102), “The latest estimate is that English comprises 616500 words”. Please notice that this number is but an outcome of “estimate”. However, we have two more figures for reference. *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* lists 450000 words and the revised *Oxford English Dictionary* has 615000, but that is only part of the total. Technical and scientific terms and words that have fallen by the wayside would add millions more.

Now we have four figures in hand 58000, 616500, 450000 and 615000. Comparatively speaking, the absolute number of characters in Chinese is much smaller than that of the words in English. However, Chinese is by no manner of means limited in expressiveness by the side of English simply because characters in Chinese collocate more strongly than words in English. That’s why a primary school graduate in China is expected to get a hang of only 3000 characters and anyone who can read and write 800 characters is considered to be literate.

What about the number of neologisms? It seems more of anybody’s guess. The thing is the standard of being considered as a neologism is relative instead of absolute. But according to John Ayto, the compiler of *20th Century Words* “... about 90000 new words or words with new meanings that came into the English language in the 20th century have been recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (p. III)”. Another thing that is also worth bearing in mind is what E. W. Burchfield says in *The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage*. Under the entry “neologism” we read “In broad terms the language tolerates the introduction of something the order of 450 neologisms a year of a kind admissible to our largest dictionary, the OED, but many fall by the wayside as time goes on”.

Let’s have a look at things in the U. S. A., Canada and down under, or anywhere where English is used as the first language. As the 20th century rolled on, young native speakers of English all over the English speaking world found it appealing to accept black English as a mark of their generation under the influence of American youngsters. They wanted to be “cool” (excellent) or “groovy” (pleasant). They didn’t like to be “square” (old-

fashioned). “Being mellow” (relaxed) was their only way in life. They “blow their top” (lost their temper) at every turn. They tried in every way to “make it big” (become successful, especially financially). They used at will “far out” instead of extraordinary, “jack” of “money”, “tomato” of an attractive girl and so on and so forth. And “no way”, “no go”, “no-no” and “no nothing” were heard to fall frequently from the lips of even some educated speakers of English.

The exclamation “right on” denoting full agreement is black American English and was first recorded in 1925, e. g.

**Dialogue 1** (*right on* = *I fully agree*)

*Situation: Two people are talking about art.*

— Only in a capitalist society will art be turned into profit.

— *Right on.* (*20th Century Words* p. 500)

People now find it hard to associate the use of words like what I have just mentioned above with any special social groups. President Nixon, the famous politician once couldn’t but drift with the time and said in public “Right on” and gave his “thumbs up” (*The Adventure of English* p. 325).

I have a personal story to tell here, I think I will be long forgetting the talk given to us by my father about his experience when he was receiving an American professor of English by the name of Dr. Blatchford nearly thirty years ago. He was a scholar of no small achievements in the field of sociolinguistics and teaching English as a second language. He was at that time invited to teach English at Lanzhou University while still holding the post of vice chairman of TEASL in the USA. My father, as chairman of the Foreign Languages Department of Northwest Normal University in Lanzhou had the pleasure of inviting him to give a lecture to the students on the topic of “How to Improve Your Proficiency in the Use of English as a Foreign language”. Dr. Blatchford made a big hit by holding the listeners spell-bound. My father had a casual talk with him after the lecture. He said, among other things, that some students posed some difficult questions that “floored him but good”. My father failed to catch on at first and looked at him puzzled. Seeing this, he repeated by saying that one of our students asked him a question that he found it hard to answer. “But good”, though not out of my father’s comprehension, sounded a little strange to his ears. What’s more, that it should have fallen from the lips of an American professor was really way over my father’s head. The rude awakening came to him after he had consulted several up-to-date dictionaries: It was not

the American professor who was over the common run, it was my father who lagged far behind the development of the English language.

Various speakers of English seem to be swimming in a sea of words and surfing in big waves of neologisms. We Chinese speakers of English can neither keep ourselves aloof from the others. That's why I don't deem it unnecessary to resort to more examples which have become very popular in everyday life. Please make a pause before every italicized word or expression in the following dialogues and ponder a little more over and see if you are already quite familiar with them, If not, try to guess their meanings from the context. Chinese translations of all the dialogues in this book are attached at the end of this book for reference. Please look at them if the need arises.

**Dialogue 2** (*Let's see the bad news = Bill please*)

*Situation: A family of five Americans has just finished their lunch at a restaurant in Beijing. An old man is ready to pay the bill.*

- Hey, miss, let's see the *bad news*?
- Pardon?
- Could we have the bill please?
- Ah, yes, sir. Just a moment. Here is the bill.
- Wah, the news is really bad today. Let's see, 485 yuan. Here is 500 yuan, don't give us back the change.
- Thank you, sir, but we don't accept tips.

**Dialogue 3** (*uni-grad = university graduate; Ivy = Ivy League, a prestigious university; biz = business; teleworker = one who works at home with the aid of various communication tools*)

*Situation: Two passengers are talking about their work while making a train journey.*

- Very glad to make acquaintance with you.
- Me too, I'm lucky to have someone to speak English with while making such a long journey on the train. The way you look you must be a university student.
- I'm a *uni-grad* from Harvard.
- Harvard? That's one of the *Ivies* in America.
- Yes, it is.
- What *biz* you in now?
- I'm a *teleworker*.

- Sorry?
- I work at home rather than in the office with the aid of various communication tools like making telephone calls, sending e-mails, surfing the net and so on.

**Dialogue 4** (*Good-arvo* = *Good afternoon*; *What's the damage for* = *How much should I pay*; *bird* = *one hundred dollars*; *rip-off* = *swindle*)

*Situation: An old Australian goes for his car at a garage. He's now talking with a young American mechanic who has just fixed his car.*

- *Good-arvo*, mate. I'm here to see about my car.
- Good afternoon, sir. Your car is ready now.
- *What's the damage for* the repair of my car?
- All in all, it's just a little over five *birds*. Well, just give me a round number, five *birds*. You are one of my most valued clients.
- You don't say? Five hundred dollars for a small fault like that ? What a ... erm ... well ... whatchamacallit your American expression just escaped me. Wah, I remember it now. What a *rip-off*!
- Your car is nearly beyond repair. The engine was coughing and missing. It's no picnic fixing a junk car like yours, sir.

**Dialogue 5** (*soaps* = *soap opera*; *couch potato* = *television fan*; *idiot box* = *TV set*; *vegetable* = *stupid person*)

*Situation: A kid is asking his mother if he can turn on the TV.*

- Mum, can I turn on the TV? My favorite *soaps* will be on.
- You just do that, you little *couch potato*. Go upstairs and get ready for bed. If you go on spending so much time in front of the *idiot box*, you'll become a *vegetable*.

**Dialogue 6** (*to have a lot going for sb.* = *to have a lot to recommend sb.*; *anymore* = *nowadays*)

*Situation: An old couple are talking about the necessity of letting their grandchildren know something about the basic knowledge of sex.*

- Well, darling, do you still remember the woolen fabric jacket we bought for our grandson, Bob, last year?
- How can I forget? That jacket was sort of big for him at that time and you intended to take it back to the store and demand a refund, right?
- Dead right.

- What did I say?
- You said you were sure he would grow into it a year later.
- Yes, that's just what I said.
- How right you were! He tried the jacket on yesterday, and, to my happy astonishment, it is now just his fit. He's nearly grown into a cool young man. His class teacher says time and again that he really *has a lot going for him*. But there is one thing I am worried stiff about; he is now going about with some girls. Don't you think it's high time we told him something about the birds and bees.
- No worries, dear. *Anymore* kids tell us what to do as far as those facts of life are concerned.

**Dialogue 7** (*go steady* = be boyfriend or girlfriend; *to give somebody the air* = to stop going steady with; *you should worry with* = *you needn't worry*)

*Situation: Two bosom friends are sitting under a tree and chatting away to each other about their private life.*

- How are things with your parents?
- About the same as usual. What about you? I mean you and Helen.
- Helen? Oh, she is just history. We are already through.
- You don't say? Tell me another.
- It's true. I'm not having a joke with you.
- But you've been *going steady* so long. What's up with her?
- She has found a sugar daddy, so to speak, a rich American businessman.
- So she *gave you the air*?
- It was I who took the initiative in breaking off the relationship with her.
- Well done, Xiao Wu! *You should worry with* your good looks, good health, and great ability. She is not the only fish in the sea.
- But you know what. She even intended to play on both sides of the street and suggested brazenly that we might as well keep on *going steady* on the sly.
- Terrible! Really it takes all sorts of people to make up the world.

**Dialogue 8** (*to moonlight* = to work at a second job at night; *on the never-never* = by installments).

*Situation: Two friends are talking over the phone.*

- Hello, Jane speaking.
- Hello, Jane. I went to see you last Saturday evening but found myself on the wrong side of the door.
- Why didn't you call before you came?
- I tried to drop in on my way back from a meeting with some soccer fans. I thought you were at home. Where were you that evening? Did you go partying?
- Go partying? That'll be the day! I was *moonlighting*.
- You wanna take it easy. What price money if you don't have good health?
- I couldn't agree more. I know health is the greatest wealth, but I can't help it.
- You short?
- Yap... we bought a car *on the never-never*. You know my hubby has been pressed for money, and that makes two of us. I have got to make some side money to pay off the loan.

**Dialogue 9** (*umfriend* = *unmarried husband or wife*; *biopsy* = *excision of living fissure for diagnostic study*)

*Situation: Two people, (one of whom is a visiting scholar from China), are talking about their neighbor's misfortune.*

- How come our neighbor has been looking sort of depressed recently?
- Well, he doesn't want me to tell anybody about what has happened to him, but just between you and me... do you know Helen?
- Sure. She's John's steady.
- Well, more than that... She's John's *umfriend*.
- Pardon?
- They cohabit.
- Co-what?
- They live in defacto state of marriage.
- You mean they now live together as husband and wife although they are not married?
- That's about the size of it. You know Helen has been diagnosed to have cancer in her right kidney.
- Oh, no. Very, very sorry to hear that. Has everything been confirmed?
- Yes, she has gone for a *biopsy*.
- What's the doctor's advice?



- Her trouble is well advanced. Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormone treatment will not do the trick. Doctors have decided to perform an operation on her.
- An extraction?
- No, a transplant, because they fear that the cancer might move on to the other one.
- Well, it never rains but it pours. It will cost them an enormous sum of money, I'm afraid.
- The good thing is that her life insurance will cover everything. In addition their fathers are both millionaires. They are willing to do everything to save her life.
- This is a “good luck in misfortune”, just as we Chinese put it. I thank you to pass on to him my deepest sympathy when you see it fit.
- I will.

**Dialogue 10** (*on an as-is basis* = according to what you see; *freebie* = something given free; *on appro* = to be returned without payment; *cheapie* = something cheaply made).

*Situation: A man is having a browse in a crazy shop where a great variety of goods is on sale.*

- Can I help you, sir?
- Thank you, I'm fine. I need to have a look first.
- You are welcome.
- Oh, erm... excuse me, miss, but where can I see some irons?
- Step this way, if you please. Here we are, irons of different makes.
- Is this one made in Japan?
- No, it's a Chinese product, and the quality is just good.
- How much is it?
- Ninety nine dollars.
- Any discount or preferential price today?
- Yes, we've been on a clearance sale for more than a week. Our special offer is: if you buy one and the other is a *freebie*.
- Sounds attractive, ah. But can I buy anything here *on appro*?
- No, sir. Sales are done here *on an as-is basis*, with no returns. But you can try out anything you plan to buy.
- I'm just wondering if the iron is but a *cheapie*.
- Well, sir, it's cheap indeed, but it's not a *cheapie*. It lasts wonderfully well, I assure you.