

Individual Perspectives on the Impact and Regulation of Chinese Neologisms

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Abstract

The explosive emergence of neologisms has become one of the most salient features of contemporary Chinese. Adopting an individual-centered perspective, this paper examines their impact on daily language life and proposes corresponding normative strategies. The study finds that neologisms empower speakers by enriching expression, strengthening social identity, and expanding cognitive boundaries; yet their vagueness, value deviations, and fragmented usage also pose risks such as comprehension barriers, erosion of values, and weakened critical thinking. Therefore, we should respect the natural laws of linguistic evolution, integrate educational guidance with media governance, and build a tripartite normative system of “monitoring–education–communication” to ensure that neologisms serve individual growth and social interaction in a healthy and orderly manner.

Keywords

Neologisms, positive impact, negative impact, normative strategies.

1. The Development of Chinese Neologisms

From a linguistic standpoint, neologisms are linguistic signs born at a specific historical juncture amid social change, technological breakthroughs or cultural cross-fertilisation. They arise in three main ways: outright coinage through compounding, clipping or functional shift, e.g. “AI +” or “curator/brand manager”; semantic extension of existing words, as when “special-forces” migrated from the military domain to label anything “high-intensity and high-efficiency”, giving rise to the fixed pattern “special-forces-style XX”; domesticated borrowings, illustrated by the hybrid “City bu City”, where the English word “City” is inserted into a Chinese syntactic frame, testifying to deepening cross-cultural contact [1]. Together these formations constitute the bulk of present-day Chinese neologisms, coupling linguistic innovation with socio-cultural significance.

Their explosive growth is driven by converging social forces—economic pull, technological enablement and shifting collective mind-sets. In contemporary Chinese discourse such neologisms have penetrated everyday linguistic life, producing a pronounced double-edged effect. On the one hand, their flexible signification and vivid epochal content expand speakers’ expressive range, facilitate access to social circles and renew cognitive maps; on the other, semantic fuzziness, skewed value-orientations and fragmented usage pose latent challenges to individuals’ sense of linguistic norms, value formation and capacity for sustained thought. Disentangling this duality of empowerment and risk is the central concern of the present study, aiming to delimit the proper bounds of neologism use and to lay the groundwork for subsequent normative proposals and rational guidance.

2. Positive Effects on the Individual

2.1. Enriching Language Expression

Neologisms inject fresh vitality into personal expression through flexible word-formation and highly targeted meaning. Coined via compounding, clipping or functional shift, they build semantic subsystems tailored to contemporary situations: for instance, *fēnwéi-gǎn* “atmosphere-feeling” pinpoints the fusion of setting and emotional tone, so describing a café bathed in warm light and soft music as “atmosphere-feeling maxed out” paints a far more vivid picture than the bland “the environment is nice.”

Stylistically, neologisms offer speakers a diversified tonal palette. Colloquial items such as *juéjuézi* “awesome-ful” or *tàikùla* “so cool, bro” boost informality and solidarity among friends, whereas professional coinages like “new-quality productive forces” or “AI +” raise register and precision, fitting workplace reports or academic discussion. This supplementary toolkit of situation-specific expressions allows individuals to calibrate style to audience and context, overcoming the limitations of traditional vocabulary—often monolithic and poorly adaptable—and achieving more accurate, lively meaning transfer.

2.2. Enhancing Social Identification

Thanks to their “group-badge” quality and emotional resonance, neologisms act as a key medium for individuals to enter specific circles and tighten social bonds [2]. Using a given set of new words instantly broadcasts one’s affiliations: teenagers who type *yyds* (“eternal God”) or *kē CP* (“ship a couple”) establish a shared linguistic code that signals matching interests and values; office staff who pepper speech with *fùpán* (“debrief”), *bihuán* (“close the loop”) or *zhuāshǒu* (“lever”) display a “business mindset,” shortening the psychological distance with colleagues. This convergence of linguistic symbols helps newcomers feel at home in unfamiliar settings and reduces the “identity gap” in communication.

When public events or collective emotions erupt, neologisms often encapsulate shared feelings. During the time *nìxíngzhě* (“the one walking in reverse”) became the exclusive tag for front-line medical staff; uttering it expressed not only a label but tacit approval of courage and dedication. Such semantic consensus forges emotional links and reinforces the perception that “we belong to the same value community.”

2.3. Expanding Cognitive Horizons

Coined in the midst of social change, neologisms package new objects, ideas and domains; to appropriate them is to import fresh knowledge and widen one’s mental map. Tech- and industry-born items act as miniature windows: *yuán-yǔzhòu* “meta-verse” introduces the notion of a blended digital-physical space, while *tàn-zhōnghé* “carbon neutrality” directs attention to low-carbon development. More than mere labels, these terms carry the core concepts of their fields, allowing speakers to erect a basic cognitive scaffold overnight and patching the “emerging-stuff gap” left by traditional knowledge systems. Equally important, neologisms loosen rigid mind-sets. *Sōngchí-gǎn* “loosen-up feeling” counters the old imperative of constant tension and perfectionism, urging a focus on mental balance and self-acceptance. By internalising such notions individuals re-examine inherited beliefs, shifting from a single-lens to a multi-perspective view of society and of themselves.

3. Negative Effects on the Individual

3.1. Impediments to Comprehension

The current flood of neologisms is accompanied by pervasive semantic fuzziness that challenges individual understanding, often producing misinterpretations and derailing

communication. Take zhòngcǎo (“to be grass-planted”) and báocǎo (“to pull grass”), two beauty-circuit coinages: in a single chat A says, “I was grass-planted a lipstick recently—have you pulled it yet?” intending “I was recommended it, have you bought it?”, whereas B hears “Have you abandoned the idea of buying it?” and replies, “No, I still want it.” The resulting cross-talk blocks effective information transfer [3].

Equally disruptive is the grammatical opacity of many items. Acronyms such as yyds (“eternal God”) or affective expletives like juéjuézi (“awesomesauce”) confront unfamiliar users with opaque strings; in formal writing or inter-generational/cross-cultural settings their deployment becomes a barrier that prevents addressees from grasping the speaker’s real intent.

3.2. Spread of Harmful Values

Buzzwords such as tǎngpíng (“lie flat”) and bàilàn (“let it rot”) have gained viral currency among the young, broadcasting a passive mind-set that undermines individual resilience. Convinced that hard work will never deliver an apartment or a promotion, many now embrace “lying flat” or “rotting away” as a supposed release from pressure, abandoning upward striving. Once this attitude takes root it erodes enterprise; confronted with setbacks the first reflex becomes flight rather than fight, replacing engagement with resignation.

Other coinages actively promote money worship. The phrase yǒuqián rènxìng—“if you’ve got money you can do as you please”—casts cash as the supreme licence, brushing aside ethics, law and social responsibility. Under its spell some chase luxury at any cost: merchants push fake or sub-standard goods for super-profit, netizens flaunt wealth online, and followers conclude that happiness and respect are for sale. The result is a corrosive, single-minded pursuit of money that distorts personal values and, in extreme cases, normalises fraud and other illegal behaviour.

3.3. Erosion of Deep-Thinking Capacity

The omnipresence of fragmented tags such as juéjuézi (“awesome-sauce”) or 666 (“cool-cool-cool”) flattens both utterance and thought, disrupting coherence and logic. A film is dismissed as “juéjuézi” without any mention of plot, cinematography or acting; the speaker offers an emotional jolt instead of an articulated judgment. Habitual recourse to such clichés trains the mind to stay on the surface: confronted with complex issues people default to one-click reactions rather than sustained analysis, and in academic or workplace settings they produce hollow, poorly linked ideas that stunt personal development. When students pepper essays with half-understood buzzwords in place of evidence-based argument, the result is vacuous text and weakened reasoning.

4. Normative Strategies

4.1. Follow the Laws of Language Development

Linguistic theory shows that language change proceeds by “survival of the fittest,” gradual shift and systemic self-consistency [4]. Rather than freezing neologisms by decree, we should let them grow while giving science-based guidance. Continuous monitoring (e.g., through the National Language Resources Monitoring & Research Center) tracks token frequency, contexts and semantic drift; items that stabilize and enjoy broad consensus—rural revitalization, big data—are promptly entered into The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary to codify their status. Contested forms such as lying flat are discussed in academic fora and the media to map their legitimate semantic space instead of being banned outright.

Standards must be domain-specific: in general communication (news, school textbooks) only widely accepted, non-vulgar coinages are recommended, whereas specialised jargons are tolerated within their own professional niches.

4.2. Strengthen Educational Guidance

Schooling should place language-norm education on the front line, with neologisms as a core module. In Chinese-language classes teachers can allot specific slots to unpack new words— semantics, grammar and culture. When presenting cyber-items like zhòngcǎo (“grass-plant = recommend”) and báocǎo (“grass-pull = buy/abandon”), they need to trace the multiple networked senses, explain why they arose and model appropriate contexts through sentence-level drills and role-play, preventing ambiguity-induced misuse.

Extracurricular contests add momentum: a “neologism disambiguation race” asks teams to tease apart near-synonyms or fuzzy buzzwords, while a “create-a-sentence showdown” demands grammatically sound, semantically precise sentences using assigned new tokens. Both cultivate accurate, context-sensitive usage and heighten awareness of linguistic norms.

For the wider public, community colleges and adult-training centres can offer literacy workshops and expert lectures that map the birth, spread, proper handling and cultural impact of neologisms, raising society’s ability to tell the helpful from the harmful and to employ new words responsibly.

4.3. Regulate Media and Platform Practices

As the main conduit for neologisms, online platforms must tighten content vetting. A clear, step-by-step review protocol should be established to screen every new coinage; items that convey passivity, vulgarity or violence are to be blocked or removed before they can spread.

AI algorithms and big-data analytics should assist human reviewers: semantic and sentiment analysis flags suspicious tokens in real time, while trend mining spots surges of harmful buzzwords, enabling pre-emptive intervention. Users who repeatedly circulate banned or toxic neologisms face warnings, temporary suspension or account closure, cultivating a healthier cyber-speech environment.

Traditional and new media alike bear a guiding responsibility. They should give prominence to positive, constructive coinages and provide glosses that explain meaning, register and appropriate context, dispelling public confusion [5]. By interpreting rather than merely echoing new words, media outlets can steer audiences toward accurate, civil usage and foster the balanced evolution of contemporary Chinese vocabulary.

5. Conclusion

In today’s high-speed information flow, neologisms surge like tides and have become an inseparable layer of daily life. They expand the expressive repertoire, strengthen social solidarity and push cognitive frontiers forward, offering speakers vivid, concise and image-rich communicative tools. Yet the same wave brings visible risks: semantic blur and non-standard grammar hinder mutual understanding; some items amplify unhealthy values; fragmentary buzzwords erode sustained, critical thought.

To counter these side-effects, we must respect the natural laws of linguistic evolution while reinforcing school-based and life-long language education, cultivating users’ media literacy and critical judgment. Online platforms should tighten automated and human review procedures, and traditional or new media must actively interpret and steer public usage. Together these measures can neutralise the negative impact of neologisms, safeguard the health of the Chinese language and support the balanced intellectual growth of every speaker.

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