

# ԼԵԶՎԱԲԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

**Grisha GASPARYAN**

*Yerevan State University*

## **THE ROLE OF OCCASIONAL WORDS IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

*Nonce (occasional) words have mainly been studied as means to solve immediate problems of communication in spoken language and as stylistic devices in written language. Obviously, little attention has been paid to their specific role in oral communication while the research of occasional words in real interpersonal communication reveals the dynamic tendency of language development. The present paper is an attempt to reveal structural, semantic and pragmatic features of occasional words taken from live communication. It is based on the study of a set of occasional words that reveal the daily changes in the language and the role of those words in oral speech.*

**Key words:** *occasional (nonce) words, economy principle, interpersonal communication, coinage of new words, encoding-decoding of a message, needs of communication*

In an era of globalization English is used as lingua franca and seems to occupy an increasingly remarkable place in international communication. When we take up an English dictionary, the first thing that comes to our mind is that we are holding a book where the definitions of all the words can be found, while when we compare the written English with the spoken one, we see that not all the words actually can be found there. Every day the English word-stock undergoes enormous changes. These changes are conditioned by many factors: the main factor is the individual English speakers' propensity to accommodate English according to the needs of the communication.

The changes of the word stock make the vocabulary full of new lexical units and to learn all those words or include them in dictionaries is simply impossible, so modern linguistics tries at least to explore those changes and their influence on vocabulary. Nonce (occasional) words are also results of those changes and the current paper is an attempt to explore and introduce what role they perform in interpersonal communication. All the examples of nonce words illustrated and examined in this paper are taken from native and foreign English speakers' everyday live communication.

### **Nonce Words as Means of Replenishing the English Vocabulary and Their Linguistic Analysis**

From the very start it is necessary to introduce the meaning of the “nonce word” as presented in the dictionaries. The Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary defines “nonce word” as: “a word or expression coined for one occasion” /OALD 7<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006/. For example, the word *cheeseless* (without cheese), was coined by an Italian boy on an occasion when he was describing the type of pizza he loves (*cheeseless pizza*).

In the Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonology we find the following definition of “nonce word”: “A term describing a linguistic form which a speaker consciously invents or accidentally uses on a single occasion” /Crystal, DOLP, 5<sup>th</sup> edition/ such as in the word combination “typical *amsterdamaian* photo” (a photo taken in Amsterdam), the tourist guide consciously invented the word.

A more elaborate definition is found in theoretical literature. Here the linguistic phenomenon under study is generally recognized as follows: nonce (occasional) word is a word or a word combination coined for the use at the moment of speech only in the given context. Quite usually it is formed irrespective of the norms and rules of the word-formation. It may or may not become proper lexical unit, depending on whether it will later be used or not /Crystal, 2000, Крюкова, 2014, Несветаило, 2008/, for example the word *Erasingly*, meaning “erasing”, was coined by a girl who was expressing her anger about her teacher who was complaining about her painting and was erasing it at the same time (*erasingly*). This coinage was completed by adding an adverbial inflexion to a verb in gerund, which is grammatically incorrect so it is less possible that the word will be used later by other speakers.

According to Schmid, there are three main strategic approaches that might be implemented in order to examine nonce words:

- First, the *structural approach* to the study of new words (the development of the properties of a word).
- Second, the *functional approach* (the familiarity of the word in the speech community).
- Third, the *cognitive or semantic approach* (the formation and entrenchment of a concept associated with the word in the minds of the members of a speech community) /Schmid 2008: 3/.

Using these three approaches and analyzing nonce words according to the causes of their formation we can reveal their role in interpersonal communication.

Firstly, the most important reason for the formation of nonce words is the need to solve an immediate problem of communication when the speaker tries to find adequate words for the expression of his thoughts /Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2011/. In order to clarify this statement let us adduce some examples of nonce words coined for this reason: *overfreedom* (too much freedom). The word coined by me while I was expressing my opinion about Europeans. The word was formed

in haste to solve an urgent communication problem while completing the assignment “Describe Europeans with only one word!” The word *check-inaholic* (a person who is addicted to doing check-ins on facebook while travelling or having an activity), was coined by a Serbian girl describing guest-students who like showing off in front of their friends about what they are busy with abroad. The word-combination *dislikable photo* means a photo deserving “dislike” on facebook. The word was coined by an American guy trying to qualify a photo uploaded by his friend on facebook.

Secondly, nonce words might be coined to reflect different stylistic shades in speech, quite often to make an impression on listeners and attract their attention. This view suggested by L. Minaeva considers people’s propensity to be in the center of attention which serves as a productive basis for the formation of nonce words /Minaeva, 2007: 30/. The point mentioned above can be illustrated by the following examples:

*Hintful* (full of hints). The word was coined before an exam by a student who was preparing his answer to the question “How is the weather today?”. The answer: “The weather looks full of promises” was qualified to be very “*hintful*” by other students around.

*Circumstantial* people (people, whose mood and behaviour towards others greatly depend on the circumstances). Implication of meaning: people, who do not have an established character. The word was coined by an American guy who was expressing his opinion about Europeans. It was a kind of a euphemism used by the speaker, instead of saying “egocentric”.

*Masarykish* (typical of Masaryk University). The word was coined to show the peculiarities that this university has. It was used in the context when the coiner of this word learnt that the lessons there start at 7 a.m. The word made those who heard it got interested in the university as it seemed to be unique and quite different.

Proceeding with the analysis of occasional words, we want to introduce the next reason for their coinage suggested by M. Dooly. According to him, people’s habit to play with words can serve as a reason for the coinage of occasional words. In order to be able to invent new words, one should be familiar with the language and be flexible enough not to be afraid to play with it /Dooly, 2006: 85/. This word-play is vivid in the words like:

*Showing-offly* – “People check-in on Facebook *showing-offly*”. An American guy expressed his anger about people who are prone to show off on Facebook.

*Choicy* (meticulous about choices). It’s a word coined by a shop assistant. I asked whether I can try the coat on the mannequin and in reply she said that I was a very “*choicy*” person.

*Longie-shortie* – the antonym pair referring to the type of lover one may have (longie – with whom one has long plans – marriage, children etc., shortie – just a lover for a short time).

Here it should be noted that even though playing with words is a great tool for the formation of nonce words, it is usually realized through violation of conventional language norms: in the example *showing-offly* the adverb-forming suffix *-ly* is added to an adverbial particle, or in case of *overfreedom* the adjective-forming prefix *over-* formed a noun. Another vivid example of breaking morphological rules is the formation of the nonce word *sadcasism* (meaning: “black humour”, a word coined by an American who did not like such kind of jokes). In English the word sarcasm is a simple word borrowed from Latin, so it cannot be split into smaller elements. Nevertheless in *sadcasism* we see that it was perceived as a compound word, that is why a sound interchange took place. We came across a similar coinage in another American’s speech, the word *sourcasism* was coined as a synonym to the word *sadcasism*. The theories adduced above came to prove us that nonce formations are mainly made both because of the immediate need of communication and people’s habit to play with words. However, our research shows that there are other reasons as well, such as the words *sadcasism* and *sourcasism*: these words were coined to express discontent, annoyance and sarcasm as well. As for the antonym-pair *longie-shortie*, it should be mentioned that they are formed to simplify the speaker’s wording, that is to say, instead of giving long passages defining the relationship, just one word is used.

People’s linguistic creativity, i.e. their aptness to invent new concepts or add qualities to the existing ones, is one of the regular reasons for the formation of nonce words. “Every language user is linguistically creative” is a truism” — states Ronald Carter in his article on language and creativity /Carter, 2004: 258/. Hence, the more creative language users are the more nonce words will appear in the language. Below are some examples of nonce words coined as a result of people’s linguistic creativity:

*Superstitionless* (without superstition). It was coined by a German teacher, who was describing himself saying that “I am very *superstitionless* person”. The speaker might have used another word to express the same idea but he preferred to coin an “easier” version.

*Hateless* (loving, without hatred, kind). The word was coined by an American guy who was expressing his opinion about the Czech people comparing them with the Hungarians saying that “The Czech people are known for their *hateless* character”.

*Examless* day (a day without exams). The word was formed by a group of girls who were happy to hang out since they did not have exams, and feeling a kind of relief they shouted “Finally, we have an *examless* day”.

Five hundred *crownish* (around five hundred crowns (Czech currency)). The word combination was coined by a Slovak girl who was trying to remember the price of her skate. It was coined quite accidentally. The reason for such coinage is that the coiner wanted to speak fast and said whatever her linguistic intuition prompted.

*Undirty* someone's shoes (to clean the shoes). A hotel receptionist who did not speak English well asked the guests *to undirty* their shoes before entering the rooms. This case, however, was the result of illiteracy in the language.

*Overpunctuality* (extremely punctual). A student was so punctual that submitted his homework even before the field to submit it was open. So the teacher, who did not get it blamed the student for his "*overpunctuality*". It made the student be careful about his "punctuality".

*Rhinocerosy* (full of rhinoceroses). The word was coined by an Armenian girl, describing her dreams. What she meant: "Before I fall asleep I see an abyss full of rhinos". The reasons for this coinage are like those of "*crownish*", when the speaker wants to be as fast as possible while speaking.

The suffixes *-ish*, *-less*, *-y*, *-ship* etc., prefixes *un-*, *over-* are productive means for the coinage of nonce words. In the examples adduced above many morphological word-forming rules are neglected, which is typical of the coinage of nonce words in oral communication, for instance, in the word *overpunctuality*, prefix *over-* is added to a nominal stem, whereas normally it is added to an adjective. It follows logically from this example that in the flow of speech speakers' linguistic intuition prompts them to make up a "sudden" word neglecting general rules of morphology and word-formation. In the word *undirty*, again we notice that the speaker breaks the rule, adding the prefix *un-* to a word containing negative meaning. In the examples *examless* and *superstitionless* suffix *-less* helps the speaker to express his ideas easily and fast avoiding long word-combinations, that is to say, the same way such words as *computerless*, *pictureless*, *penless* might be coined. In the words *Englishes* and *Erasmusing*, the plural-forming ending *-es* is added to an uncountable noun English and the grammatical ending *-ing* was added to a noun *Erasmus*, not a verb. Here also we observe breaking of some grammatical norms which simplify the speakers' wording making it faster and easier for them to express their thoughts.

One of the commonest types of nonce words are blends (blended words, blendings). They have been meticulously examined by Judith Munat /Munat, 2007: 297/. The scholar defines blends as words made up of two different words. She calls the word part "**splinter**". In the word like *frenemy*, '*enemy*' is the splinter (*frenemy* < friend + enemy, meaning a "false friend"). An important part of Munat's research is the discrimination of a special type of blends, the orthographic ones. Mostly the oral and written forms of blended words are identical, however, there are some that can be identified only when seen in written form, for example, *buyography* < buy + biography or *shampagne* < sham + champagne. These are the orthographic blends that can adequately be decoded only in writing. In this research Judith Munat points out the places where the blends usually occur, these are mainly newspapers, advertisements, headlines etc. Blends easily occur in oral speech as well. Sometimes people blend words in order to appear more joyous or to manage to convince others. Blended words may also be used to attract attention especially

when they are used in newspaper headlines /Munat, 2007: 299/. Here are some blends we have come across in real communication:

*Nevercome* roommate < never + come – meaning: a person who leaves a dormitory with the intention not to come back anymore. This blend was coined by a student who was fed up with his roommate. He used this as a nickname telling that “Nevercome finally is in his hometown”.

*Frenemy* < friend + enemy – meaning: a false friend. The coinage was made by a native American addressing his friend. This is an alternative, euphemised way to describe a friend in order not to sound offensive.

*Funrature* < function + structure – the coinage was made by a non-native speaker of English while telling about structure and function of an organization and did not want to repeat the two words all the time.

The formation of blends helps the speaker to express his thoughts fast and clearly. If a speaker uses compounding to form a nonce word, it is easier to make a blend, because blends mainly consist of root-morphemes and it is very easy to mix those roots and coin a new word.

As different theories state, the main function of a nonce word is to solve an immediate problem of communication and the examples we found in live communication again came to prove the accuracy and rightness of those theories: nonce words simplify the speech act for the speaker, the latter expresses his ideas easily and shortly, solves his immediate need of communication, whereas our research gives us right to state that the coinage of such nonce words has also so to say “side effects”. There are two such effects and they both have their influence on the listener: the latter may not understand the nonce word or may misunderstand it. When do such things usually happen?

Firstly, the process of communication generally and the communication via words consists of two processes: encoding and decoding of a message. While communicating with nonce words the process of encoding is simplified i.e. the speaker coins a word sometimes neglecting the conventional word-building patterns or in case of blends merely putting the word-parts next to each other. On the other hand, the process of decoding becomes complicated for the listener, the latter should have some background linguistic knowledge such as knowing what meanings the affixes have, for example in the above-mentioned example the word *rhinocerosy*, the suffix *-y* expresses a meaning of content, such as in the English word *salty*, so the listener should have background knowledge to decode the message produced by the speaker. The polysemy of some affixes may also complicate the communication for the listener, for example the suffix *-ish* in *crownish* shows approximateness, in *masarykish* – typicality, hence the listener should know some other words formed with this suffix in order to decode the message correctly. Quite often the process of the coinage of nonce words results in illiterate formations and presents difficulty for the listener to understand it, for example, the nonce word *choicy*, though it is easy for the coiner to make it up, it is

difficult for the listener to decode it, since it was coined by “copying” the pattern of an already existing word *choosy*, which may be unknown to the listener.

The dynamic tendency of language development leads to the coinage of new lexical items called occasional (nonce) words. This coinage is influenced by a number of factors, primarily by the need to solve an immediate problem of communication. The functional analysis of nonce words found in the native and non-native English speakers’ live communication shows their role in interpersonal communication: the speakers coin a nonce word to make their thoughts be expressed easily avoiding long word-combinations and sentences, thus contributing to the economy principle in the language, so the main role nonce words play in interpersonal communication is the simplification of communication for the speaker. On the other hand, the decoding process of a nonce word may demand some background linguistic knowledge on the part of the listener to understand the meaning conveyed in the nonce word properly or not to misunderstand it. The enrichment of the stock of nonce words in the language is an ongoing and endless process, so every moment a great many English speakers will have communication needs or will want to simplify their wording thus giving birth to new lexical units.

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**Գ. ԳԱՍՊԱՐՅԱՆ – Դիպվածային բառերի դերը միջանձնային հաղորդակցության մեջ.** – Հոդվածի նպատակն է վեր հանել, դիպվածային բառերի դերը միջանձնային հաղորդակցության մեջ: Հոդվածը հիմնված է իրական հաղորդակցությունից քաղված օրինակների վրա: Ստացված արդյունքները փաստում են, որ դիպվածային բառերը հիմնականում ստեղծվում են հաղորդակցության հրատապ խնդիրներ լուծելու համար: Կախված ստեղծման պատճառից՝ դիպվածային բառերը կատարում են որոշակի դեր միջանձնային հաղորդակցության մեջ: Խոսողի համար դիպվածաբանության ստեղծումը կարող է պարզեցնել խոսակցությունը, մինչդեռ խոսակցի պարագայում այն շատ հաճախ դժվարություններ կարող է առաջ բերել, հատկապես, երբ բառը ստեղծվում է բազմիմաստ բառերի բառաբարդմամբ կամ բազմիմաստ ածանցների միջոցով: Դիպվածաբանությունների ստեղծումը շատ հաճախ ենթադրում է բառակազմական կանոնների և ձևաբանական որոշ կառույցների խախտումներ:

**Բանալի բառեր.** դիպվածային բառեր, լեզվական տնտեսում, միջանձնային հաղորդակցություն, նոր բառերի ստեղծում, հաղորդագրության կոդավորում-ապակոդավորում, հաղորդակցության պահանջներ

**Г. ГАСПАРЯН – Роль окказиональных слов в межличностной коммуникации.** – Цель статьи заключается в выявлении роли окказиональных слов при межличностной коммуникации. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что окказиональные слова в основном образуются для решения срочных коммуникативных задач. В зависимости от причин их образование, окказиональные слова выполняют определенную функцию в межличностных отношениях. Для говорящего образование окказионализмов может упростить разговор, в то время как для собеседника может стать причиной определенных затруднений, особенно когда слово создается путем сращения многозначных слов или многозначных суффиксов и приставок. Образование окказионализмов часто предполагает нарушение словообразовательных правил и конструкций.

**Ключевые слова:** окказиональные слова, экономический принцип, межличностная коммуникация, образование новых слов, кодирование-декодирование сообщения, потребности общения