



Investigating Neologisms in Politics

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Abstract:

This article investigates the emergence and function of neologisms within political discourse, defining them as linguistic tools that reflect social, economic, and political shifts. By examining politics as both the art of governance and a process of conflict resolution, the study explores how politicians deliberately coin “coded” language to manipulate public opinion, conceal truths, or simplify complex ideological goals. These terms are classified into referential and expressive categories, providing a historical analysis of 19 specific examples—such as “normalcy,” “vietnamization,” and “intifada”—to demonstrate how new lexical units become embedded in the collective consciousness during times of crisis. Ultimately, the research concludes that while neologisms enrich language through cultural contact and borrowing, their primary role in the political arena is to function as tools for “language manipulation” to serve undeclared governmental aims.

Keywords: Political Neologisms; Political Discourse; Language Manipulation; Referential Neologisms; Expressive Neologisms.

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Introduction

Language is a means by which humans define themselves. Hence, it is referred to as a social identity. In this way, individuals use language to share their culture and express their experiences as well as to interact with one another. New words constantly emerge in languages reflecting a linguistic, social, economic, cultural or political needs to do so. These new words are commonly known as neologisms. Politicians quite often tend to coin new words, creating what is known as political neologisms. A variety of reasons stand behind, such as to allay anxieties, conceal, shade, or disguise the truth, or to obscure rather than clarify the intent of their statements. In this regard, Edelman (1977) declared that “language is an integral facet of the political scene: not simply an instrument for describing events but itself a part of events, shaping their meaning and helping to shape the political roles officials and the general public play” (as cited in Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.3). Hence, almost all political vocabularies were at one point in history neologisms, as undeniable is the fact that politics is an art that requires the use of persuasive rhetoric epitomized sometimes in the creation of neologisms.

1-The Art of Politics Defined

Attempting to define the word politics is fraught with difficulties. There are numerous legally recognized meanings of politics rather than just one. To put it another way, there are several acceptable and valid definitions for the term, making it, therefore, a loaded term. Politics lacks a consistent technical vocabulary, a sufficient and accurate language with a vocabulary of established meaning, in contrast to the natural sciences. When a mathematician, chemist, or physicist uses phrases like “logarithm,” “chain reaction,” or “molecule” respectively, their listeners understand what they mean. However, because of the differences in viewpoints, every member of the listeners assigns his own personal interpretation to every political analyst who discusses liberalism, socialism, conservatism, or socialism. Consequently, reaching a consensus is challenging (Miller, 1962). Additionally, fresh understandings of politics appear over time, which inevitably causes the term's exact meaning to disappear. Heywood (1997) contemplates that politics is defined differently in different contexts and at different times. Business and commercial matters, for

example, were not regarded as the proper domain of politics in the eighteenth century as they are today. In general, politics can be identified in a variety of ways, including the use of authority and power, collective decision-making, the distribution of limited resources, deceit and manipulation, and more (as cited in Modebadze, 2010, p.40).

Politics, in its broadest definition, is the process by which individuals create, uphold, and revise the laws that govern their daily lives. Therefore, politics and the phenomena of cooperation and conflict are intricately intertwined (Heywood, 1997, p.1). Notwithstanding, a closer look reveals that this wide view of politics creates more questions than it does provide answers. People dispute on whether political power should be widely distributed among a society's members or centralized in the hands of a few number of leaders due to the limited resources accessible to the community. For instance, should certain people deserve a larger portion than others, or should everything be distributed equally? Diverse people have diverse opinions about the appropriate course of action because there is no one appropriate response to such questions. Some analysts including Grant, Bentley, Roberts, and Dobson contend that the core of politics is the conflict that results from the displaying of divergent opinions (Modebadze, 2010, pp.40-41).

Hence, disagreement leads to political issues. To put it another way, politics is based on this disagreement. There are inherent disparities in situation, status, power, opinion, and goal that give rise to this dispute. Individuals differ in their judgments, attitudes, and points of view. There are so many differences between them that it would be hard to come to a consensus on everything (Modebadze, 2010, p.40).

On the one hand, disagreement over the rules that govern people's lives is inevitable when there are conflicting viewpoints, desires, needs, or interests. On the other hand, people understand that they need to cooperate with others to change these rules or guarantee that they are followed. Because of this, the core of politics is frequently depicted as a conflict-resolution process where opposing viewpoints or interests are balanced. However, due to the fact that not all conflicts can be settled, politics in this wide sense is better understood as a quest for conflict-resolution rather than as its accomplishment (Heywood, 1997, p.1). The view of politics examined below is politics as the art of government.

Well-known is Chancellor Bismarck's statement, "Politics is not a science... but an art." The art of governance, or the administration of power within society through the formulation and implementation of collective decision-making, was the art Chancellor Bismarck was referring to. Having evolved from the term's initial meaning in the Greek language, this is arguably politics' most classical definition (Heywood, 1997, p.2).

The term "politics" comes from the Latin "polis," which literally translates as "city-state." The community of ancient Greece was made up of separate city-states, each with its own political structure. Athens, which is seen as the birthplace of democratic governance, was the biggest and most significant of them. According to this meaning, politics might be defined as "what concerns the polis," or the polis' affairs. Thus, "what concerns the state" is the modern version of this definition. Its common usage makes this perspective on politics abundantly clear: individuals are referred to as "in politics" when they wield public offices or as "entering politics" when they aspire to do so (Heywood, 1997, p.2).

Additionally, academic political science has contributed to the perpetuation of this notion. The conventional perspective of the discipline holds that politics is about "what concerns the state," which is evident in the propensity of academic research to concentrate on the government's workforce and apparatus. Therefore, studying politics is essentially studying governance, or more generally, studying the use of power. Politics, according to David Easton, is therefore the "authoritative allocation of values." (as cited in Heywood, 1997, p.3). By this, he implies that politics includes all of the ways that the government uses to react to social forces, especially when it comes to providing rewards, penalties, or benefits. Hence, "authoritative values" are those that the majority of people in society believe to be obligatory. According to this perspective, politics is linked to "policy," or official or authoritative rulings that create a community's course of action (p.3).

This definition, however, presents a rather limited perspective on politics. Politics is what happens in a “polity,” which is a social structure centered on the government apparatus. Thus, politics is practiced by a small and particular set of people, most notably politicians, civil servants, and lobbyists, and can be found within cabinet rooms, parliamentary chambers, government offices, and others more. This indicates that the majority of people, organizations, and social activities are “outside” of politics. In this view, companies, educational institutions, families, community organizations, and so on are “non-political” since they are not involved in “running the country” (Heywood, 1997, p.3).

However, this definition can be further refined and narrowed down. The propensity to view politics as the same as party politics is indicative of this. To put it another way, only state actors who are intentionally driven by ideological convictions and who aim to further them by joining a formal organization such as a political party are considered to be part of “the political.” In this sense, politicians are characterized as “political,” but public officials are viewed as “nonpolitical,” provided that they behave impartially and professionally. In a similar vein, judges are viewed as “non-political” individuals who apply the law objectively and in light of the information at hand. However, they could be charged with being “political” if their decisions are swayed by bias or personal preferences (Heywood, 1997, pp.3-4). In connection to all what has been said, the language used in politics by politicians is called “political discourse” as it is intended to serve specific purposes and hidden ideologies for the sake of manipulating the public.

2- Political Discourse

The term “discourse” is problematic and has multiple meanings. Because of its interdisciplinary character and unclear definition, it is still relevant for examination even after over half a century of research. Numerous academic fields, including linguistics, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, anthropology, logic, ethnography, jurisprudence, political science, computational linguistics and artificial intelligence, alongside others, study this concept (Horbenko, 2023, p.166). The multidisciplinary nature of linguistics and the synthesis of cognitive and communicative approaches explain the broad approach to studying discourse, which is a complicated communicative phenomenon with numerous characteristics associated with linguistic product, context, genre, ideology, and, according to a wide approach, culture, social community, and historical period.

The works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Edward Said, Ernesto Laclau, Jacques Derrida, Antonio Gramsci, and Pierre Bourdieu are considered classics in the field of discourse theory. These researchers examined discourse and its impact on power dynamics and our social reality. They examined a number of topics in their works, including linguistic issues, the definition of social standards and principles, the structure of identity, and the relationship between speech and power. The writings of these authors are classics in the subject of discourse theory and are crucial for comprehending how discourse influences our social reality (Horbenko, 2023, p.166).

Teun A. van Dijk, Jurgen Habermas, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault were among the academics who established the theory of political discourse. Their writings on this subject are regarded as masterpieces. Z. Harris coined the term “discourse” as a stand-alone term in his article “Discourse Analysis” in 1952. Discourse, according to him, is a sequence of sentences that are written or spoken by an individual or group of individuals under a certain circumstance (Horbenko, 2023, p.166).

Michel Foucault developed his own vision about the aim and purpose of discourse analysis in the 1960s by drawing on Emile Benveniste's teachings. Discourse, according to the French school of discourse analysis, is oral or written language, a complicated process or outcome of linguistic activity, and a particular kind of expression typical of a given social-political group or era (Horbenko, 2023, p.166).

As an advocate of semiotic theory, Roland Barthes studied a wide range of discourse types, including those on history, medicine, mythology, customs, fashion, advertising, and mass-produced goods. According to him, social signs with mythological overtones and socially significant meanings make up discourse. Important semantic meanings can be communicated not only by words but also by images and objects (Horbenko, 2023, p.166).

Using communicative action as the best communicative model, wherein free and consensus-oriented communication is crucial to reaching agreement in the dialogue process, Jurgen Habermas linked discourse acts to the theory of social action and the issue of social legitimacy (Horbenko, 2023, p.166).

Teun A. van Dijk's research, which employs both broad and restricted definitions of the term "discourse," is crucial for a comprehensive grasp of the idea. Discourse, in its broadest definition, is a complicated communicative event that involves both verbal and non-verbal elements and which occurs between a subject and an object in specific settings. Discourse, in its narrower definition, is a text or conversation that is the product of communicative action and solely consists of linguistic elements. He sees discourse as either a completed product or a product in progress that is open to interpretation by recipients (Horbenko, 2023, p.166).

Based on all previous definitions, Horbenko (2023) proposes a definition of discourse as an intricate communication process that is dependent on extralinguistic elements and cannot take place outside of political, social, and cultural contexts. Political discourse shapes the recipients' perception of the world because it expresses the whole intricate network of relationships between an individual, society, and the state (p.169). Political actors' objectives, political culture, and politicians' professional status are some of the variables that may influence political discourse because it is a complicated communication phenomenon that requires the addresser and the addressee as well as context and situation (p.170).

The particularity of political discourse, according to Horbenko's work, lies in its focus on implementing policies and attaining political objectives. Therefore, based on the definition and roles of political discourse, its key characteristics are as follows: a thorough reflection of the communication between the individual and society; orientation towards public awareness; subjective connection with the respondents; future-orientedness; polemics; the mediated nature of most citizens' political experience; theatricality; and the use of formalized means (Horbenko, 2023, p.170). In this regard, special attention has to be paid to media's political discourse. In today's world, this kind of political discourse is crucial since it moulds people's conceptual vision of the world and shapes public opinion.

All in all, every facet of human cognition is influenced by politics, which is a broad and universal component of human activity. According to Oxford Dictionary (2015):

Political Jargon refers to the words and phrases used by politicians, lobbyists, the media, and other people to talk about political issues in a quicker, coded way. Political jargon is the shared language of catch phrases spoken by those in politics.

Significant to the topic under discussion is the word "coded" which implies hidden aims behind. A politician's memoir, editorials, international treaties, political speeches, and press conferences are just a few examples of the various genres that fall under the umbrella of political texts. Politicians employ skills in political language as a potent instrument to gain control of the public and advance their careers. Instead of delivering the truth to the public, they rely on propaganda and slogans to accomplish their objectives and many would vote for them. According to Crystal (1995), "the language of politicians, especially when they are speaking in public, is an interesting mixture of old and new". He adds:

It displays much of the ritual phraseology and consciousness of precedent which we associate with religion or law; and it makes use of many of the rhetorical and dramatic techniques which we associate with advertising or the media. It is a variety which is much abused. (p.378)

Newmark (1988) holds a similar opinion. For him, "political language is particularly susceptible to a quick 'accept' and 'reject' and every word as well as every person gets ten minutes of fame" (p.153). Many lies and empty promises, both acceptable and undesirable, are included in the language they use. Instead of advising other people, their primary goal is to convince them of their viewpoints. The beautiful and magnificent jargon they use usually implies nothing or the exact reverse of what they mean (as cited in Hanaqtah, 2019, p.159).

3- Societal/Political Change and Political Discourse Change

Jeffries (2006) and Algeo (1993) both claim that the social, political, and cultural development of peoples and societies is reflected in the English language. In order to adapt words to new circumstances and political climates and propagate them throughout the system, language users embrace and attempt to generalize innovations in the speech community. According to Aitchison (2013), there are two ways that language changes: consciously and unconsciously. On the one hand, conscious language change refers to external pressures (from above); this indicates that language users are cognisant of the change as a result of having concepts transferred to conscious awareness. As a result, the mind absorbs concepts from the environment and then creates new words (as cited in Hadi & Al-Majdawi, 2019, p.705).

Pressures from below, on the other hand, are changes that occur without conscious awareness. People never notice this difference. Only when language is transmitted from one generation to the next can linguistic change be guaranteed. The new word is created by language if it identifies a need. This necessity is recognised by Rey (1995), who postulates that “every model needs a terminology adapted to its purpose... Every change in the system of knowledge requires parallel changes in the system of designation” (p. 56).

Linguists face difficulties when elaborating languages. They believe that the creation of a word creates an economy of discourse. After being used quite often in society, the word eventually gains acceptance. According to Bauer (2002), a significant amount of new words are produced by both productivity and creative thought (as cited in Hadi & Al-Majdawi, 2019, p.706).

Politicians are considered as the masters of producing words that are used through their campaign or speeches in times of crises to skillfully affect the minds of common citizens. These new words are commonly known as neologisms. Even though political analysts have long examined the various ways that language influences politics, we still fail to fully understand how politics influences language. The popularity and endurance of freshly coined words should be the primary focus after taking into account how they spread into wider usage. The ones provided in this study are associated with some major episodes in recent American history: the post-First World War era, the Second World War, the Cold War, and the events of September 11, 2001.

Interestingly enough, wars can influence language change in various ways, and are responsible for the creation of new words and expressions. One of the weapons used by warmongers is language manipulation. A thorough examination of neologisms in politics as well as their types is provided in the section below.

4- Neologisms in Politics

Political discourse is regarded as a powerful tool that shapes political policies in addition to providing a wealth of political knowledge. One characteristic of language is neologisms, which give names to the new ideas that arise in the society's political life. They manifest with the actualisation of certain events and are associated with political and economic transformation. According to Jeffries (2006) and Westbrook (2012), societal and linguistic shifts are influenced by changes in politics, demography, society, and the economy. Political and economic pressures are generally seen as “the chief determiners for providing the framework for terminological activities as well as the means for their realization” (Rey, 1995, p.50). Numerous neologisms are used in political discourse to allude to worldwide global politics and new political systems (Hadi & Al-Majdawi, 2019, pp.704-705).

A neologism is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “a newly coined word that may be in the process of entering common use, but has not yet been accepted into mainstream language.” According to the same dictionary, the term first appeared in English towards the close of the eighteenth century. “A word or phrase which has entered the language relatively recently, often commented on and collected in specialized dictionaries” is how Harmann & James (1998) describe neologisms (as cited in Hanaqtah, 2019, p.160). Neologisms are described by Leibold (1989) as the “combination or modification of existing words, or the addition of modifying prefixes and suffixes to words to condense or simplify the message and accelerate delivery” (p.110). In his turn, Rey (1995) states that a neologism is:

A unit of the lexicon, 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 language. (p. 77)

Newmark (1988) also defines it as “newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense” (p.140). After being created, the new words are used to determine whether they are appropriate for the language; some are granted acceptance while others are deemed inappropriate and fall out of use, particularly when they deal with delicate subjects like racism and religion. In his research, Newmark identified twelve distinct types of neologisms, which he categorises into two main groups: Words and collocations with new meanings make up the first group of lexical items. New forms, including new coinages, make up the second group. Cabré (1999) considered the same classification and named them referential and expressive neologisms based on their function: “Referential neologisms develop because they are required, i.e. there is a gap in a specific special field that must be filled; expressive neologisms develop simply to introduce new forms of expression into the discourse” (p.206). This classification is adopted in the current chapter when neologisms are defined.

Indeed, new words are not exclusively novel as Metcalf (2002) suggests, “Successful new words often turn out to be older than we think.” They are created to refer to novel ideas or to rephrase more traditional terminology. They are more common in environments where information spreads quickly and in cultures that are changing quickly. They emerge from a variety of factors, including political and economic change, rising living standards, a more varied cultural life, advanced technology, an evolving educational system, a more flexible labour market, and new social issues. Neologisms spread like wildfire and are frequently made famous via word-of-mouth, the media, and the internet. Its presence in dictionaries and glossaries indicates that lexicographers have approved of it (as cited in Hanaqtah, 2019, p.160).

There are several methods to identify if a unit is a neologism or not, according to Cabré (1999). She believes that “a unit is a neologism if it has arisen recently, if it is not in dictionaries, if it exhibits signs of formal instability (e.g. morphological, graphic, phonetic) or semantic instability and if speakers perceive it as a new unit” (p.206). She also notes that neologisms vary from one another in a number of ways, including how they were created, how they serve a primary purpose, how they relate to other systems, how they persist in the language, how they coexist in the system, how they connect to other systems, and how they relate to co-occurring synonyms.

As stated previously, when describing social issues or events, politicians frequently employ neologisms to distort the facts, conceal scandals, and influence public opinion. These neologisms occasionally imply the reverse of what is actually meant, and they frequently conceal an untold meaning. It is challenging to understand certain terms because they are constantly used for a specific covert purpose. In what follows 15 neologisms are provided to serve as examples of the politicians’ intended aim behind creating them.

5- List of Some Selected Neologisms

In each of the definitions provided below, the neologism is classified into one of the two categories: referential or expressive. Simultaneously, the aim behind the creation of such a neologism is also made clear.

5-1-Normalcy (expressive): The term *normalcy*, which had a strictly mathematical meaning in the 1850s, was first used as “mathematical condition of being at right angles, state or fact of being normal in geometry.” Since 1920, the term has been linked to the American President Warren G. Harding, who ran for the presidency against President Woodrow Wilson that year with the slogan “Return to Normalcy,” which refers to his adherence to conditions prior to World War I (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2025). In his “Readjustment” speech, delivered on May 24, 1920, he declared:

America’s present need is not heroics, but healing; not nostrums, but normalcy; not revolution, but restoration; not agitation, but adjustment; not surgery, but serenity; not the dramatic, but the dispassionate; not experiment, but equipoise; not submergence in internationality, but sustainment in triumphant nationality.

As one may perceive, Warren G. Harding in this speech intended to criticize the policies of President Woodrow Wilson during and after World War I, namely the idealist approach to foreign policy as opposed to Harding's realism, and interventionism as opposed to his preferred isolationism. Hence, he used the term normalcy to respond to people's wishes whose wounds resulting from the war could not be healed until the U.S. embraces back its pre-WWI policies.

5-2-Iron Curtain (expressive): Although this phrase is usually assumed to have been coined by Winston Churchill for his Fulton address in 1946, it had appeared occasionally in high-level diplomatic discourse well before Churchill "projected the phrase into the wider public domain" (Chilton, 1996, 163). Therefore, the term *Iron Curtain* was technically a Cold War era coinage, but Churchill popularised it, helping to create and maintain the image of the "impenetrable barrier" that referred to the U.S./U.S.S.R. rivalry as a conflict between an open, democratic system and a closed, totalitarian one (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.15). At the very beginning, the phrase made its highest-level debut. For a number of years, its growth curve increased consistently before reaching a peak and then starting to decline gradually. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it ultimately levelled off at the level it has inhabited ever since. There, it is still usable for historical references but is rarely used in relation to recent or continuing developments (p.20).

5-3-Containment (referential): Originally the primary subject of the U.S. ambassador George Kennan's 1947 highly influential "X-article", which was a secret telegram that he had sent to President Harry Truman in 1946 and was ensuingly published in *Foreign Affairs*, it became the fundamental principle of American foreign policy during the Cold War. The concept of *Containment* gave American politicians an easily comprehensible and widely appealing foundation for implementing a more assertive foreign policy approach than the country had previously adopted (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.15), providing helpless countries that were resisting Communist subjugation with economic and military aid. "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures," declared President Truman on March 12, 1947, in his address before a joint session of Congress. Although he avoided an overt usage of the term *Containment*, his policy was centered on containing Communism within all its spheres to halt its spread and prevent it from reaching the Middle East and North Africa.

5-4-Domino Effect (referential): It is a term coined by the U.S. President Eisenhower during the Cold War era that reflected the belief that adjacent countries would quickly fall at the hands of the Communists if one neutralist or Western-allied nation did. In response to a question regarding the strategic significance of Indochina to the free world during his April 7, 1954, news conference, President Eisenhower said:

You have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the 'falling domino' principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.

That metaphor was used to justify U.S. military engagement in Vietnam during the 1960s, and the dramatic increase in the use of the term in 1975 when the South Vietnamese government was overthrown indicates that the possibility of such an impact was inevitably correct and a top concern. Since then, the phrase has been used to describe a growing number of political, economic, and other major developments, and its use remains constant and unchanged (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.20).

5-5-Collateral Damage (referential): A Cold War term used to describe unplanned damage caused by military actions; it frequently functioned as a euphemism for civilian fatalities (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.16). According to Britannica (2025), it is any kind of damage —such as fatalities or injuries— that occurs during a conflict or a war but harms civilians. In other words, it is any harm done to something other than the intended target—one main scenario is civilians killed in a military operation. The phrase was coined during the Vietnam War to defend the unconscionable murder of defenceless people, and it solidified into American military jargon over the course of several decades.

5-6-Disinformation (referential): It is the intentional diffusion of misleading false information with the goal of influencing the policies or viewpoints of those who receive it, particularly when it comes from a government or its agent to a foreign power or the media. This coinage was originally used by Soviet planners and is derived from Russian *dezinformatsiya* (first used in 1949). In 1985, Webster's New College Dictionary and the American Heritage Dictionary were the first dictionaries to include the term *disinformation* (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2025).

5-7-McCarthyism (referential): It is the name ascribed to describe the period in American history during which Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy conducted a number of investigations and hearings in the 1950s to reveal alleged Communist infiltration of different branches of the American government. Since then, the phrase has come to refer to the defamation of character or reputation by widely reported, indiscriminate accusations, particularly when they are based on unsupported charges (Britannica, 2025).

5-8-Vietnamization (referential): It was a term coined by the Nixon administration to describe the United States' phased withdrawal from Vietnam. This policy would have exposed the U.S. government to accusations of abandoning its frequently avowed commitment to reversing communist advancements in Southeast Asia and the world if it had been phrased in a complex manner. Thanks to President Nixon's smartness, *Vietnamization*, on the other hand, was largely praised as a positive development since it was described as relying more on South Vietnam to protect itself (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.15). *Vietnamization* was ultimately a short-term strategy for American disengagement and withdrawal, and the term swiftly faded from use as the conditions that gave rise to the policy ceased to exist in the first place (p.19).

5-9-Silent Majority (referential): Nixon was confronted with growing calls for an end to hostilities at the same time he announced his plan to vietnamize the war. He thus declared that the *Silent Majority* of Americans, who were described by one anonymous White House source as "a large and normally undemonstrative cross-section of the country" that customarily "refrained from articulating its opinions on the war," fully supported his recently announced policy ("Nixon Declares 'Silent Majority' Backs His Speech", 1969). Nixon's rhetorical combination of *Silent Majority* and *Vietnamization* effectively painted war opponents as disconnected radicals determined to retreat quickly under dubious conditions (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, pp.15-16).

5-10-Watergate [the suffix -gate] (referential): They are interconnected political scandals involving the Nixon administration of the United States that came to light after five burglars were apprehended on June 17, 1972, at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters at the Watergate office-apartment-hotel complex in Washington, D.C. Hence, Nixon became the only American president to resign on August 9, 1974, as he faced probable impeachment for his part in concealing the scandal (Britannica, 2025). The suffix *-gate*, which has been attached to an apparently never-ending string of scandals (such as Irangate, Koreagate, and Debatagate), may have been the primary linguistic legacy of Watergate. The most notable reincarnation of *Watergate* was *Monicagate*, which denoted the repercussions from the sexual affair between President Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Of course, *-gate*, which has been characterized as "the most obvious contribution of Watergate to the language" (Schudson, 1992, 150) was not devised until well after the Watergate period itself (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.16).

5-11-Smoking Gun (referential): It is evidence that identifies the criminal when a crime is committed (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). Although the expression *smoking gun* has its roots in a Sherlock Holmes story from 1893, it was not until the Watergate hearings, when there was a disagreement about whether there was concrete evidence of Nixon's guilt, that it "blazed its way into dictionaries" (Sigelman & McGuire, 2014, p.16). *Smoking gun*, a Watergate phrase, has also developed steadily, though there have been sporadic upward spikes, such as in 1987 when President Reagan's knowledge of an arms-for-hostages agreement in Iran captured the public's attention and more dramatically in 2003 during the fruitless hunt for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (p.20).

5-12-Perestroika (referential): The origin of the term is the Russian language (перестройка [p'ir'i'strojkə]). In order to reorganise Soviet economic and political policy, Mikhail Gorbachev launched

this program in the middle of the 1980s. Gorbachev loosened economic controls and pushed businesses to become self-financing in an effort to bring the Soviet Union up to the economic level of capitalist nations like the United States of America, Japan and Germany (Britannica, 2025). Since then, this term has been included into English language dictionaries as a result of the significant attention that American politicians paid to the policies and programs of the USSR.

5-13-Antifa (referential): It is a large dispersed political movement made up of people and organisations who think that fascism still presents a special peril to democracies and stable societies and that it must be defeated by unusual, radical, and occasionally violent and unlawful measures. The term *antifa* is borrowed from the German *Antifa*, itself a shortened form of *antifaschistisch* (“antifascist”), which formed part of the name of a multiparty front initiated by the German Communist Party in 1932 to counter Nazism. Over the past few years, the term *antifa* has been used to describe counter-demonstrators at the 2017 Unite the Right march in Charlottesville, Virginia, U.S.A., as well as participation in left-wing demonstrations against racism and police brutality in the United States starting in the mid-2010s. Republican President Donald Trump and other conservative politicians have frequently referred to *antifa* as a terrorist organization, despite the fact that it lacks a clear leadership or organisational structure and is more appropriately described as a movement, association, or simply a collection of actions and strategies employed by far-left demonstrators (Britannica, 2025).

5-14-Intifada (referential): Originating from the Arabic language word (انتفاضة), this term refers to one of two popular Palestinian uprisings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that sought to establish an independent Palestinian state and put an end to Israel's occupation of those areas. The first Oslo Accords, which established a framework for peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, were signed in September 1993, bringing an end to the first intifada, which had started in December 1987. September 2000 marked the start of the second intifada, also known as Al-Aqsa intifada. The majority of commentators concur that by late 2005, it had reached its end, despite the fact that no single event marked its demise. Over 5,000 Palestinians lost their lives as a result of the Second Intifada alone (Britannica, 2025).

5-15-Keffiyeh (referential): It is a traditional headdress worn by men in parts of the Middle East, usually made of cotton. The black-and-white checkered *keffiyeh*, which represents the Palestinian liberation movement, is also worn to convey political sentiments as a symbol of Palestinian identity. The *keffiyeh* was used as a disguise for demonstrators to hide their identities during the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt against the British administration. Even in urban areas, where the *keffiyeh* progressively replaced the fez, all Palestinians wore the garment as a sign of solidarity when British authorities tried to outlaw it. When Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), started donning the *keffiyeh* during public appearances and diplomatic gatherings in the 1960s, it became even more a Palestinian trademark. The *keffiyeh* was the de facto flag of Palestine at anti-Israel demonstrations from 1967 until the Oslo Accords in 1993, when Israel outlawed the flying of the Palestinian flag in Gaza and the West Bank. To draw a parallel between their battle and the Arab Revolt of the 1930s, activists wore the *keffiyeh* during the first and second intifadas, which took place in 1987–1993 and 2000–2005, respectively. Since the beginning of Israel's 2023 onslaught on Gaza, the *keffiyeh* has once more come to represent Palestinian solidarity and unity. According to the *New York Times*, “at a march for Gaza in Lower Manhattan on Oct. 26, 2025, *keffiyehs* were worn by diverse groups carrying Palestinian flags. At a pro-Palestine demonstration in Washington, D.C., a protester draped a *keffiyeh* over the head of a statue of Benjamin Franklin” (Britannica, 2025).

5-16- 9/11 (referential): It is the abbreviation for the date September 11, 2001, when terrorists flew planes into the Twin Towers in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and a field in Pennsylvania, killing thousands of people. The attacks were said to be carried out by al-Qaeda, an Islamist extremist group, under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden (Oxford Learner's Dictionary). Hence, *9/11*, *al Qaeda*, *Osama Bin Laden* and *Patriot Act* were all new entries in the second edition of the Encarta Webster's Dictionary of the English Language released in 2004. Later, the phrase came to refer to any terrorist assault that causes a great deal of harm or death to innocent people. This second meaning's instances involve references to the March 11, 2004, commuter train assaults in Madrid, which were among the deadliest in

contemporary Spanish history, as “Spain's 9/11” and the September 2004 siege of Beslan, which claimed the lives of over 320 people, many of them children, as “Russia's 9/11” (NBC News, 2004).

5-17-Ground Zero (expressive): It is the point on the earth's surface directly above, below, or at which an explosion, especially a nuclear explosion occurs (Britannica, 2025). In 1946, the phrase was initially used in reference to atomic explosions. The World Trade Centre was turned into a place of fear and anguish after two hijacked planes crashed into the Twin Towers in the United States on September 11, 2001 as mentioned earlier. Because of the extent of the damage and destruction the attack wrought, it was named *Ground Zero*.

5-18-Anthrax (referential): It is an acute, infectious, febrile disease of animals and humans caused by *Bacillus anthracis*, a bacterium which under some circumstances produces extremely resistant spores that can persist and keep their virulence for many years. While grazing animals like cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and mules are most frequently afflicted with *anthrax*, people can contract the disease by consuming the meat or coming into contact with the wool, hair, hides, bones, or carcasses of infected animals. A sore with a coal-black centre appears when *anthrax*, which gets its name from the Greek word for coal, attacks a person's skin (Britannica, 2025). This disease was linked to what became known as bioterrorism in the United States in October 2001 after four letters containing *anthrax* were transmitted via the U.S. Postal Service, despite the fact that the word was first used in Mediaeval Times. Five people were killed, 22 people fell ill, and millions more experienced fear and anxiety in consequence of the 2001 attacks.

5-19-Bushism (referential): The term “Bushism” refers to the weak character of George W. Bush, the forty-third President of the United States who served in office from 2001 to 2009. This weak character was deduced by the public through his words, phrases, pronunciations and linguistic errors in his public speaking. The term “Bushism” since then has become an accepted one in published books and is used to caricature Bush. Obviously, the noun “Bushism” is a neologism which consists of the proper noun (Bush) and the suffix -ism (Hadi & Al-Majdawi, 2019, p.706).

Conclusion

Neologisms are a vital part of languages to adequately reflect and keep pace with the new social, political, economic, or cultural developments in any society. They also enrich languages for, due to some circumstances, they are formed out of borrowing from other languages. Examples are plentiful including the word “*intifada*” borrowed from Arabic, and the word “*perestroika*” borrowed from Russian. This contact between different languages enhances the dialogue among various cultures. Political neologisms enjoy a certain specificity, which sets them apart from other neologisms. Their specificity is epitomized in being deliberately created to serve undeclared aims which most of the time serve the government or the politician creating them, such as the words “*vietnamization*” and “*collateral damage*”. In a nutshell, politics is an art which requires the creation of new words that would form part of political discourse to meet the requirements of novel situations or events. The end goal is most of the time to swiftly, silently, and decisively dominate people’s minds to shape public opinion vis-à-vis a specific issue or enemy, or to navigate the tension between the government and its people. To paint a colourful picture, the neologisms created would necessitate also the use of a number of rhetorical techniques and devices.

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