Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review
Print ISSN: 3006-5887
Online ISSN: 3006-5895
https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11

Neology in Technology: Morphological Analysis of Naming Conventions in Internet Applications

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Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review
Print ISSN: 3006-5887
Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Abstract

This study investigates the morphological construction, lexical innovation, and sociolinguistic influences in the naming conventions of English-language internet applications. Applying theories from morphology, neology, internet linguistics, and branding linguistics, this research explores how digital naming practices reflect linguistic creativity, cultural trends, and communicative efficiency in the evolving landscape of digital discourse. Through qualitative analysis of 50 prominent applications across ten categories, the study identifies prevalent morphological processes including compounding, blending, affixation, clipping, and metaphorical naming. Findings reveal that these morphological strategies serve critical functions in establishing brand identity, enhancing memorability, and ensuring semantic transparency in digital markets. The research demonstrates how neology in the technology sector responds to the unique linguistic and communication needs of the digital era, balancing innovation with clarity while reflecting broader sociocultural shifts toward personalization, global connectivity, and linguistic economy. This study contributes to applied morphology, digital sociolinguistics, and branding theory by providing a systematic framework for understanding the intersection of language innovation and technological branding.

Keywords: neology, morphology, internet linguistics, naming conventions, digital branding, word formation, sociolinguistics, lexical innovation

Introduction

The rapid evolution of digital technology has precipitated unprecedented linguistic innovation, particularly in the domain of internet application nomenclature. Neology—the study of new word formation—plays a crucial role in technology sectors, where developers and marketers create innovative names to capture attention, convey functionality, and ensure brand distinctiveness in saturated marketplaces (Crystal, 2011). As digital platforms proliferate, naming conventions have become increasingly sophisticated, reflecting complex interrelationships between linguistic creativity, cultural trends, and communicative efficiency.

The term "neologism" derives from the Greek "logos" (word) and French "neo" (new),

embodying the dynamic nature of linguistic evolution (Peterson & Ray, 2013). In the context of digital technology, neologisms serve multiple functions: they differentiate products in competitive markets, encode technological functionality, and reflect broader cultural shifts toward digital integration (Murray, 1995). The accelerated pace of technological advancement has created a fertile environment for lexical innovation, with new terms emerging rapidly to describe novel concepts, services, and experiences.

Morphology—the study of word structure and formation—provides an essential analytical framework for understanding these neological processes. Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) defines morphology as the grammatical discipline focused on word formation and structure, examining how morphemes—the smallest meaningful units—combine to create complex lexical items. Booij (2007) further distinguishes between free morphemes (capable of standing alone) and bound morphemes (dependent on other morphemes for meaning), as exemplified in words like "rewrite," where the bound morpheme "re-" modifies the free morpheme "write." Haspelmath and Sims (2010) emphasize that morphology encompasses both systematic differences in form and meaning and the rules governing morpheme combination, establishing the foundation for lexical innovation.

Word formation processes—including compounding, derivation, acronym formation, blending, clipping, and borrowing—serve as primary mechanisms for expanding lexical inventory, particularly in rapidly evolving fields like digital media (Yule, 2010). While Zimmer (1964) notes that word creation should generally follow grammatical rules, there exists considerable room for innovation, especially in technological contexts where brevity, distinctiveness, and semantic transparency are paramount. This is particularly evident in mobile application naming, where titles must be concise, memorable, and indicative of function while navigating the constraints of app stores and digital marketplaces (Batey, 2008).

Internet linguistics, as conceptualized by Crystal (2011), provides a complementary theoretical lens for examining how digital communication environments shape language use and evolution. Crystal argues that the internet functions as a distinct sociolinguistic domain characterized by unique affordances and constraints that influence linguistic form and function. In digital spaces like app stores,

application names must operate within specific parameters: they must be searchable, memorable, brandable, and semantically transparent across diverse cultural contexts (Viramdani & Himmawati, 2017). Applications like StoryLab, StormGain, and NovelMe exemplify how compounding, metaphor, and semantic repurposing can effectively capture user attention while suggesting value and functionality.

Previous research has examined word formation processes in digital contexts, with studies indicating that processes such as abbreviations and blending are prevalent in online interactions (Mustafa, Kandasamy, & Yasin, 2015). However, systematic examination of mobile application names remains limited, despite their cultural visibility and linguistic innovation (Anandan, 2009). This research addresses this gap by investigating the morphological processes underlying internet application nomenclature and their relationship to branding strategies, user perception, and digital communication needs.

The study is guided by two primary research inquiries:

1. How do morphological techniques used in app names contribute to their brand identity, memorability, and semantic transparency?
2. What is the function of neology in the technology industry, and how do new word structures reflect the unique linguistic and communication needs of the digital era?

By addressing these questions, this research contributes to theoretical understanding of digital neology while offering practical insights for branding, lexicography, and natural language processing applications.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Neology and Word Formation

Neologisms represent a fundamental mechanism of language evolution, enabling lexical systems to adapt to new concepts, technologies, and cultural phenomena (Johnson & Davis, 2022). Peterson and Ray (2013) characterize neologisms as newly created terms or phrases that gain increasing usage in everyday communication, often emerging in response to technological innovation, sociocultural shifts, or individual creativity. In digital contexts, neologisms serve critical functions in naming novel technologies, services, and experiences that lack established terminology (Crystal, 2011).

Morphological theory provides essential tools for analyzing these lexical innovations.

Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) defines morphology as the study of word structure and formation, examining how morphemes combine according to language-specific rules. Booij (2007) categorizes morphemes as either free (capable of independent occurrence) or bound (requiring combination with other morphemes), with the latter including affixes, infixes, and circumfixes that modify base morphemes. Fromkin and Rodman (1993) emphasize that morphemes constitute the fundamental grammatical units upon which vocabularies are constructed, establishing the building blocks for lexical innovation.

Word formation processes represent the primary mechanisms through which neologisms emerge. Murray (1995) and Yule (2010) identify several key processes relevant to digital nomenclature:

1. Compounding: Joining two or more existing words to create a new lexical item (e.g., "Facebook," "Dropbox")
2. Blending: Combining parts of two words to form a new term (e.g., "Instagram," "Spotify")
3. Affixation: Adding prefixes or suffixes to existing words (e.g., "Shopify," "Feedly")
4. Clipping: Shortening existing words (e.g., "Uber" from "über")
5. Acronym Formation: Creating words from initial letters (e.g., "NASA")
6. Semantic Shift/Extension: Attributing new meanings to existing words (e.g., "Zoom")
7. Borrowing: Incorporating words from other languages (e.g., "Uber" from German)

These processes operate within both structural and functional constraints, balancing innovation with comprehensibility and communicative efficiency (Zimmer, 1964). In digital contexts, these constraints are further shaped by factors such as searchability, brandability, and cross-cultural comprehensibility.

Internet Linguistics and Digital Communication

David Crystal's (2011) framework of internet linguistics provides a crucial theoretical foundation for understanding digital neology. Crystal conceptualizes the internet as a distinct sociolinguistic domain characterized by unique affordances and constraints that influence language form and function. In this view, digital communication environments foster specific linguistic innovations shaped by technological capabilities, user behaviors, and communicative needs.

Internet linguistics identifies several distinctive features of digital language that influence neological processes:

1. Linguistic Economy: The premium on brevity and efficiency in digital communication encourages compact, easily processable forms (Crystal, 2006)
2. Multimodality: The integration of text, image, and sound creates new possibilities for meaning-making that influence lexical choices (Baron, 2000)
3. Global Reach: The worldwide scope of digital platforms necessitates names that function across linguistic and cultural boundaries
4. Rapid Evolution: The accelerated pace of technological change creates constant pressure for lexical innovation
5. Branding Imperatives: Commercial considerations shape linguistic choices, balancing distinctiveness with comprehensibility

These factors collectively create a unique environment for neological activity, where morphological processes serve both communicative and commercial functions.

Sociolinguistics of Innovation

The sociolinguistics of innovation examines how new linguistic forms emerge, spread, and become established within speech communities (Aitchison, 2012). In digital contexts, this framework helps explain how neologisms gain traction and become conventionalized. Crystal (2011) identifies several key factors influencing the adoption of digital neologisms:

1. Functional Need: The extent to which a new term addresses a genuine gap in the lexicon
2. Social Prestige: The perceived status associated with using particular linguistic forms
3. Community Endorsement: Adoption by influential users or communities
4. Technological Affordances: How well the form aligns with the capabilities of digital platforms
5. Memorability: The ease with which the form can be recalled and reproduced

In the context of application naming, these factors interact in complex ways, with successful names balancing linguistic innovation with functional clarity and cultural resonance.

Branding Linguistics and Digital Nomenclature

Branding linguistics examines how language functions to construct brand identity and facilitate consumer engagement (Kohli & LaBahn, 1997). In digital contexts, application names serve as primary brand identifiers that must accomplish multiple objectives simultaneously:

1.Differentiation: Distinguishing the product in a crowded marketplace

2. Functionality: Indicating the purpose or value proposition of the application

3. Memorability: Ensuring the name can be easily recalled and reproduced

4. Cultural Resonance: Connecting with target audiences on emotional or cultural levels

5. Technical Constraints: Operating within the limitations of app stores, search algorithms, and domain availability

Batey (2008) emphasizes that effective brand names achieve a balance between distinctiveness and familiarity, leveraging morphological processes to create forms that are simultaneously innovative and accessible. Viramdani and Himmawati (2017) further note that digital branding must navigate additional constraints related to searchability, cross-cultural comprehensibility, and technical functionality.

Previous Research on Digital Neology

Several studies have examined aspects of digital neology, though systematic analysis of application naming remains limited. Mustafa, Kandasamy, and Yasin (2015) investigated word formation processes in Facebook interactions, finding that abbreviations and blending were prevalent among young Malaysian users. Their research highlighted how digital communication environments foster specific types of lexical innovation while reflecting broader sociolinguistic trends.

Al-Salman and Haider (2021) examined COVID-19-related neologisms, identifying compounding and blending as predominant processes in pandemic-related terminology. Their research demonstrated how global crises can accelerate lexical innovation while revealing cross-linguistic patterns in word formation.

Qamar et al. (2022) studied Hindi-English code-mixed neologisms, finding that compounding and borrowing were the most productive processes in creating coroneologisms. Their work highlighted the complex interplay between linguistic systems in multilingual digital environments.

Jurida (2024) investigated word formation processes in internet communication, identifying acronyms, abbreviations, clipping, and blending as particularly productive in online contexts. Their research emphasized the role of linguistic economy in digital neology, with brevity and efficiency being primary considerations.

While these studies provide valuable insights into digital neology, systematic examination of application naming conventions remains limited. This research addresses this gap by providing a comprehensive morphological analysis of internet application nomenclature across multiple categories, contributing to understanding of how linguistic innovation operates in digital branding contexts.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive linguistic methodology grounded in the interpretive paradigm. The research design facilitates in-depth examination of morphological processes in internet application naming, allowing for detailed analysis of linguistic forms, functions, and sociocultural contexts. This approach is particularly appropriate for investigating neological phenomena, where contextual understanding is essential for interpreting the significance and function of innovative forms (Creswell, 2014).

The research integrates theoretical frameworks from morphology, internet linguistics, and branding studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of naming conventions. By focusing on morphological processes and their relationship to branding strategies and user perception, the study aims to elucidate the complex interplay between linguistic form and function in digital contexts.

Data Collection

Sampling Strategy

The research utilized purposive sampling to select 50 English-language internet applications representing ten distinct categories of digital utility:

1. Social Media
2. Communication
3. E-Commerce
4. Finance & Banking
5. Education & Learning

6. Productivity & Office

7. Health & Fitness

8. Entertainment & Streaming

9. Travel & Navigation

10. News & Information

Five applications were selected from each category based on popularity, current availability, and representation of diverse naming strategies. Applications were chosen from prominent platforms including Google Play Store and Apple App Store to ensure relevance and contemporary significance.

Data Sources

Primary data consisted of application names and their contextual information, including:

- Official application names as presented in digital storefronts
- Developer descriptions and branding materials
- User reviews and discussions mentioning application names
- Media coverage and marketing materials

Secondary data included linguistic references, theoretical frameworks, and previous research on digital neology and branding linguistics.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection proceeded through several systematic steps:

1. Identification of Application Categories: Ten categories of digital applications were established based on functionality and user purpose.

2. Selection of Representative Applications: Five popular applications were selected from each category using download statistics, user ratings, and market presence as selection criteria.

3. Compilation of Application Names: Official names were recorded exactly as presented in digital storefronts.

4. Gathering Contextual Information: Descriptions, reviews, and marketing materials were collected to provide context for morphological analysis.

5. Documentation of Sources: All data sources were documented to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Theoretical Framework

The research is guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining:

Internet Linguistics (Crystal, 2011)

Crystal's framework conceptualizes the internet as a distinct sociolinguistic domain characterized by unique affordances and constraints. This perspective helps explain how digital environments shape morphological innovation and naming practices, emphasizing factors such as linguistic economy, multimodality, and global reach.

Sociolinguistics of Innovation

This framework examines how new linguistic forms emerge, spread, and become established within speech communities (Aitchison, 2012). In the context of application naming, it helps explain how neologisms gain traction and become conventionalized, considering factors such as functional need, social prestige, and community endorsement.

Morphological Theory

Building on the work of Carstairs-McCarthy (2002), Booij (2007), and Haspelmath and Sims (2010), this framework provides tools for analyzing the structural processes involved in word formation, including compounding, blending, affixation, clipping, and semantic shift.

Branding Linguistics

Drawing from Batey (2008) and Kohli and LaBahn (1997), this framework examines how language functions to construct brand identity and facilitate consumer engagement, providing insights into the commercial dimensions of application naming.

Data Analysis Method

Data analysis employed a qualitative, morphology-focused linguistic approach with the following procedures:

Morphological Classification

Each application name was systematically analyzed to identify the morphological processes involved in its formation. Names were classified according to the following categories:

1. Compounding: Combination of two or more complete words (e.g., "Facebook," "Dropbox")

2. Blending: Fusion of parts of two or more words (e.g., "Instagram," "Spotify")
3. Affixation: Addition of prefixes or suffixes to base words (e.g., "Shopify," "Feedly")
4. Clipping: Shortening of existing words (e.g., "Uber," "Lyft")
5. Acronym Formation: Creation of words from initial letters
6. Reduplication: Repetition of all or part of a word (e.g., "TikTok")
7. Semantic Shift/Extension: Existing words given new meanings (e.g., "Zoom")
8. Metaphorical Naming: Use of metaphorical concepts (e.g., "Threads," "Pocket")
9. Neologism/Coinage: Creation of entirely new words (e.g., "Venmo," "Zelle")
10. Onomatopoeia: Words imitating sounds (e.g., "Shazam")

Functional Analysis

Beyond structural classification, each name was analyzed for its functional dimensions:

1. Brand Identity: How the name contributes to brand positioning and differentiation
2. Memorability: Factors enhancing recall and recognition
3. Semantic Transparency: Clarity of function or purpose conveyed by the name
4. Cultural Resonance: Connection with cultural values, trends, or references
5. Technical Constraints: Considerations related to searchability, domain availability, and platform requirements

Theoretical Integration

Findings were interpreted through the integrated theoretical framework, examining how morphological choices reflect and respond to the unique demands of digital communication environments. This involved analyzing the relationship between linguistic form and function, as well as the sociocultural factors influencing naming decisions.

Data Analysis and Results

"Flipboard" is a compound word made up of "flip" and "board," which makes for a strong reading metaphor. Crystal (2011) talks about how internet linguistics often uses compounds and metaphors to make digital experiences more relatable by using familiar physical actions, like flipping through the pages of a magazine or newspaper. This metaphor helps people picture the digital magazine format, which makes the platform's purpose clear and interesting. Aitchison believes that this new way of using language helps people accept it socially by linking new tech practices to old reading

habits, making it easier for people to get used to the digital news world.

The name "Feedly" is made up of the noun "feed" and the suffix "-ly," which suggests that the service will personalize and deliver content on a regular basis. Crystal says that affixation is a useful process in internet linguistics that is often used to make action-oriented or descriptive names that fit with how people use the internet. The suffix "-ly" gives the word an adverbial, dynamic quality, which means that the news feeds are tailored and timely. Aitchison would say that this new way of naming things shows that people want to be able to choose how they get their information, which is important for the modern user who needs to manage a lot of digital content quickly.

The name "Inshorts" is a combination of the words "in" and "shorts," which emphasizes short and to-the-point news updates. Crystal says that blending is a key part of internet linguistics because it lets people make short, catchy words that sum up complicated ideas quickly. This blend directly appeals to users' desire for quick, easy-to-understand information in a world that moves quickly. Aitchison thinks of this as a social innovation that meets the changing cultural need for quick and easy news consumption. This helps the platform become very popular very quickly among busy users.

Pocket uses metaphorical names to suggest that users can "keep" news articles in a storage space for later reading. Crystal says that metaphor is a strong linguistic tool on the internet because it helps people understand abstract digital functions by relating them to real-life situations. The word "pocket" makes the technology seem easy to use and portable, which makes it feel like it's yours. From a sociolinguistic point of view, Aitchison would see this as a new way of using language that makes the platform a part of users' daily lives and routines, which helps it spread socially.

Finally, SmartNews is a compound word that combines "smart" and "news." It has a clear and descriptive name that suggests an intelligent news service. Crystal says that clear, descriptive naming is still important for users to understand and trust digital services. The word "smart" suggests intelligence and efficiency that come from technology, which fits with what people expect from personalized, algorithmically curated news these days. Aitchison would say that this way of using language shows that people want reliable and relevant information, which helps the platform stand out as a modern, trustworthy source in a crowded news market.

In conclusion, these platform names demonstrate various word formation processes—such as compounding, affixation, blending, and metaphor—that Crystal (2011) characterizes as characteristic of internet linguistics. Aitchison's (2012) sociolinguistics of innovation framework elucidates how these linguistic innovations fulfill social demands for familiarity, personalization, brevity, portability, and trust. These approaches show how language changes with technology to make it easier for people to connect and engage with each other in the digital news world.

Conclusion

This study investigated the complex interplay between linguistic innovation and technological branding via a morphological and sociolinguistic examination of naming conventions in internet applications. The research was directed by the comprehensive theoretical framework of David Crystal's Internet Linguistics and the Sociolinguistics of Innovation, focusing on two primary inquiries: i. How do the morphological techniques used in app names help with their brand identity, how easy they are to remember, and how clear their meanings are? and ii. What does neology do in the tech world, and how do new word structures show how people in the digital age communicate and use language?

Morphological Strategies and Digital Branding

The study showed that morphological processes like compounding, blending, affixation, clipping, reduplication, and metaphorical naming are not just pretty or structural tools; they are also important for digital branding. These methods are used to come up with names that are: Phonetically simple and easy to remember (like Zoom and Trello); Semantically clear or suggestive (like Dropbox and MyFitnessPal); Culturally or emotionally resonant (like Calm and Spotify); and in line with digital communication norms, like brevity, novelty, and playfulness (like TikTok and Shazam). App names often use morphological creativity to make semantic cues that meet user expectations. For example, Instagram and Coursera combine semantic domains (instant + telegram, course + era) to suggest both function and new ideas. Affixed forms like Shopify and Spotify use productive morphological patterns (-ify) to signal tech-driven transformation and action, demonstrating what Crystal calls semiotic economy in digital naming.

Morphological strategies shape brand identity by making names that are unique,

interesting, and easy to say. These names serve both expressive and practical purposes.

Neology as a Socio-Technological Response

The research additionally revealed that neology within the technology sector operates as a direct reaction to the changing social, communicative, and technological landscapes. Internet applications work in environments that change quickly, and the words we use to describe them often don't do a good job of capturing new features, behaviors, or cultural values. The emergence of new word structures indicates the following: Technological affordances (e.g., speed, interactivity, globalization), Cultural trends and identity markers (e.g., personalization, informality), Communicative innovations, such as user-generated content, synchronous communication, and digital self-expression. Twitter, TikTok, and Snapchat are good examples of how new words and onomatopoeic forms can make people feel and think right away, which makes them more likely to share and engage with the content. AliExpress and Daraz also use glocal linguistic strategies, combining global brand logic with local identity cues. This supports Crystal's idea of "glocalization" in internet language. The industry also relies on symbolic resonance, which is why metaphor and semantic recontextualization (like Threads, Headspace, and Slack) are so popular. These tools use users' existing semantic schemas to make new digital functions easy to understand.

Naming as Cultural and Linguistic Artefact

In all ten application categories, app names were more than just labels; they were cultural and linguistic artifacts that encoded the communicative values, ideologies, and economic imperatives of the digital age. They show a conflict between: Innovation and clarity, global appeal and local identity, and brand uniqueness and language familiarity.

These results back up Crystal's idea that digital language is marked by linguistic economy, creativity, and sociocultural embedding. Naming conventions in internet applications exemplify this linguistic adaptation, addressing both technical limitations (e.g., app store optimization, domain availability) and sociolinguistic possibilities (e.g., community formation, identity signaling, interactivity).

Final Reflections

This study emphasizes that the morphology of app names is not solely a technical

linguistic characteristic but a locus of semiotic innovation and sociolinguistic strategy. From the perspective of Internet Linguistics and the sociolinguistics of innovation, naming conventions in the digital realm can be regarded as responsive, adaptive, and culturally ingrained processes that harmonize linguistic form with technological function.

The study concentrated on a particular group of English-language applications; however, the results facilitate additional research into multilingual and cross-cultural naming strategies, diachronic examinations of naming evolution, and comparative analyses of naming conventions across various digital ecosystems (e.g., games, AI tools, metaverse platforms).

To sum up, morphological innovation in app naming not only sets brands apart but also helps people understand, communicate, and express digital culture. It is where language, technology, and identity meet, and it changes how we think about and interact with the digital world.

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