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THE NOTION OF *NONCE FORMATION* REVISITED

Abstract

This article aims at a critical analysis and systematization of the current theories on nonce formation. To this end, a number of theoretical issues are addressed, such as the nature of the term nonce formation, its definitions proposed in the subject literature, the perspectives on the evaluation of its formal novelty as well as the meaning of the morphological and semantic structure for the identification of nonce formation. Individual sections of the article point to terminological difficulties and inconsistencies in the approaches of quoted researchers. The last section constitutes a summary of the discussion and includes a proposal of combining the enumerated research approaches in such a way as to receive a coherent definition of nonce formation.

Although the study of word formation and morphology has experienced a major revival since 1970s¹, not much insight has been gained into the nature and structural makeup of words at the stage of their first appearance in language. There seems to be considerable confusion regarding the distinctive features of nonce formation that would allow for a word to be labelled with the term, which leads to a certain degree of ambiguity in the notion itself. For example, it seems unclear whether the term *nonce formation* refers to a phase of words' development, which each institutionalized lexical item must have gone through, or if it denotes newly created words themselves rather than an early stage in their existence.

Numerous researchers have attempted to organize the state-of-the-art knowledge of the issue, but their attempts appear to have been impeded by inconsistency in the perspective of the analyses. Some authors seek the origins of nonceness in the perception of individual language speakers, while others dismiss the individual knowledge as irrelevant, concentrating on the systemic aspects of

¹ Carstairs-McCarthy, Andrew: Basic Terminology. In: Štekauer, Pavol and Rochelle Lieber, (eds): Handbook of word-formation. Studies in natural language and linguistic theory. Dordrecht: Springer 2005. Pp. 5–23.

nonce formation. Moreover, the arguments raised in the discussion are interchangeably concerned with formal and semantic aspects of lexis, being at times rooted in theories that seem to be still a subject of dispute. Therefore, the question of whether the nature of nonceness is a matter of unprecedented form coinage or new concept construal remains still unanswered.

This article aims to offer an overview of the definitions of nonce formation provided in the academic literature as well as to propose a critical analysis of the findings, suggesting a unified perspective on the subject. Section 1 attempts to outline the scope of the term's application. Section 2, in turn, is concerned with different perspectives on the nature of nonceness. It discusses the relevance of individual knowledge and linguistic capacity of speakers as well as the systemic approach to the issue, simultaneously trying to address the question of whether nonceness should be regarded as novelty from the perspective of language or speech. Section 3 summarises the characteristic and distinctive features of nonce formations as described so far by other researchers, pointing to possible implications and difficulties in their empirical application. The last section constitutes a summary of the discussion.

1. The nature of the term nonce formation

A discussion of nonce formation should probably be initiated by a definition of nonceness provided in the academic literature. However, it is already at this stage that a careful reader may mark a certain degree of inconsistency. Out of various approaches to nonce formation's nature, probably the most significant issue to be settled concerns the scope of the term's meaning, namely whether the term *nonce formation* covers *a stage* in a given word's existence or if it refers strictly to *a word* itself. This section summarises the approaches to the issue adopted by a number of scholars and attempts to outline the resulting implications.

Some of the most comprehensive analyses of nonce formation may be found in the writings of Peter Hohenhaus. In one of his earliest publications on the topic² (as cited by Štekauer³), nonce formation is described as ad-hoc formation additionally characterised by context-dependency, deviation from norm and non-lexicalizability. Therefore, it seems that in the context of this definition, one should regard the term *nonce formation* as a label applicable to each and every *word* meeting the enumerated requirements. This stance accounts for the use of a plural form *nonce formations*. Since, because of its abstract nature, no *stage in a word's development* may be plural and attributed with characteristics such as context dependency or

² Hohenhaus, Peter: Ad-hoc Wortbildung – Terminologie, Typologie und Theorie kreativer Wortbildung im Englischen. Frankfurt/M., Berlin, Bern, New York, Paris, Wien: Peter Lang 1996.

³ Štekauer, Pavol: On the theory of neologisms and nonce formations. In: Australian Journal of Linguistics 22:1 (2002). Pp. 97–112

non-lexicalizability, the term should remain unambiguous. Unfortunately, a further scrutiny of Hohenhaus's work indicates the opposite.

In an article published in 2005, Hohenhaus describes the status of nonce formations as being in opposition to neologisms in that "the status of neologism is the next stage in the life of a word", when the word has gained some recognition in a speech community, while nonce formations are to be "new in the absolute sense"⁴. Neologisms are subsequently referred to as young listemes, while *nonce* is described as a possible "first stage in a longer life-span of a word", in between a possible and an actual word, and usually limited to a single occurrence. Moreover, commenting on Bauer's deliberations over the amount of semantic content which may undergo lexicalization⁵, Hohenhaus uses a term *nonce use* with reference to listemes whose conventional meaning is replaced with a new, often playful, context-dependent one⁶. As an example of this phenomenon, Hohenhaus mentions the word *warhead*. The lexicalized meaning of this lexeme could be paraphrased as *the explosive front part of a missile*. However, when supplemented with a picture of George W. Bush or Tony Blair on posters produced during an anti-war demonstration, the word clearly gained a new, playful meaning.⁷ In this sense, *nonce formation* would need to be distinguished from *nonce use* in that the form of words included in the latter one is by no means "new in the absolute sense".

Bauer, in turn, having remarked that terminology in the field tended to be chaotic, seems to remain quite consistent in his definition. A nonce formation, according to him, is "a new complex word coined by a speaker/writer on the spur of the moment to cover some immediate need"⁸. The application of the term in the case of a given word is claimed to be limited in that the word may no longer be described as a nonce formation when a speaker using it is aware that the word has already been coined by somebody else. However, there is no mention of an appropriate term denoting a word at such a stage of development, for the second phase in a word's life to be described is a phase in which a word has already been institutionalized. Needless to say, it seems rather inaccurate to call a lexeme coined by one speaker and used by few others as institutionalized, yet the term *nonce formation* would not be suitable in such a case either. In a later publication, Bauer fills the blank space with the term *neologism*, defining it as a word which "becomes part of the norm of the language"⁹. In this outlook, a new word would be born as nonce formation and – if spread in a speech community – would become neologism.

⁴ Hohenhaus, Peter: Lexicalization and institutionalization. In: Štekauer, Pavol and Rochelle Lieber, (eds): Handbook of word-formation. Studies in natural language and linguistic theory. Dordrecht: Springer 2005. Pp. 353–373.

⁵ Bauer, Laurie: English word-formation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983.

⁶ Hohenhaus, P.: Lexicalization and institutionalization. P. 363.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Bauer, L.: English word-formation P. 45.

⁹ Bauer, Laurie: Morphological productivity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.

However, the distinction between nonce formations and neologisms, according to Bauer, could be drawn only in retrospect, because the eventual status of a lexeme may not be foreseen – diachronically, after a while, it may “turn out to have been a neologism”.¹⁰ What Bauer seems to be suggesting here is that the status of neologism or nonce formation is determined by the final outcome of a word’s evolution rather than by a state of institutionalization at a given point in time. In such an outlook a word is either a born neologism or a born (and immediately declining) nonce formation, and both terms should be interpreted rather as labels denoting individual lexemes than stages in their development.

In Crystal’s perspective, nonce formations are “items” coined on the spot to fill a particular communication need.¹¹ Examples provided by the author are *chopaholic* (denoting someone who likes lamb chops), *cyberphobic* and *unsad*. All these instances are claimed primarily to fill a lexical gap which occurs at a spur of a moment, with no intention of a speaker to spread the coinage in a speech community. In distinguishing between neologisms and nonce formations, Crystal concentrates rather on the speaker’s intentions and synchronically assessed distribution of the lexeme than on diachronically observed evolution of a lexeme’s status.

Guz¹², having cited a number of authorities in the field, defines nonce formation as “the first stage in the life of a new word just upon its production by the language user”. A similar approach is taken by Lipka, who refers to nonce formation as a stage in the development of lexemes and mentions possible alternative terms of *ad-hoc formation* and *contextuals* to be found in literature¹³. The first compound, being comprised of an adjective and a deverbal noun, displays the same range of ambiguity as the term *nonce formation*, whereas the latter one seems to be applicable in the case of novel output products of word formation processes. In the monograph by Guz, moreover, there is a statement suggesting that nonce formations are not part of core vocabulary and “will never gain currency with many speakers”.¹⁴ Producing such a statement, the author clearly attributes the label *nonce formation* to the lexical items themselves, which stays in opposition to the stance taken previously. If nonce formation is a stage in a word’s life, it cannot be described as *a part of vocabulary*, but rather *a stage in existence of vocabulary items*. In this outlook, nonce formation may never gain currency with many speakers, because these are

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 40.

¹¹ Crystal, David: Investigating nonceness: lexical innovation and lexicographic coverage. In: Boeing, Robert and Kathleen Davis, (eds): *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press 2000. Pp. 218–231.

¹² Guz, Wojciech: *Register variation and lexical innovation. A study of English nominalizations*. Lublin. Wydawnictwo KUL 2010.

¹³ Lipka, Leonhard: Lexicalization and Institutionalization in English and German. In: *Linguistica Pragensia* 1 (1992). Pp. 1–13.

¹⁴ Guz, W.: *Register variation and lexical innovation*. P. 33.

words at the stage of nonce formation that may (or may not) gain such a currency – and as soon as they do, their *development stage* ceases to be called *nonce formation*.

Let us now try to systematize the above described contributions to the discussion and try to find some common ground in the varying approaches. First of all, there are a few stages in words' existence that could be enumerated on the basis of the cited literature:

possible word → nonce formation → neologism → listeme → lexicalized item

In the opinions of most researchers, the core criteria for distinguishing the phases are a word's novelty and a degree of institutionalization, neither of which may be evaluated at the synchronic plane. Therefore, the difference between those stages could be demonstrated only through a diachronic study of a given word's development. This is because, as shown by Hohenhaus, a word may be both institutionalized and deinstitutionalized¹⁵, hence a low frequency of use may indicate that a word is either a neologism or a listeme undergoing deinstitutionalization. Considering only statistical data derived from a given point in time, one would be unable to capture the difference between those two stages. According to some authors, however, synchronic study could allow for an extraction of additional features characteristic of each phase, such as a speaker's intention and individual perception mentioned by Crystal. This notion will be discussed in the next section of this article.

The cited authors seem to refer to a nonce formation as to a novel output product of word formation processes and a stage in a word's development interchangeably. However, there seem to be considerable implications for the definition of the notion in the case of those approaches. Considering a nonce formation as an item, one would be forced to apply a certain label regardless of the fact that it is impossible to predict the word's future development. Taking the example of the famous compound *apple-juice seat* used by Downing and denoting a seat in front of which a glass of apple juice has been placed¹⁶, Štekauer remarks that labelling the compound as a nonce formation, one may never be sure whether the lexical item becomes institutionalized as a name for an important element of restaurants' décor in the future¹⁷, thus gaining the status of a listeme. Therefore, the terms of *possible word*, *nonce formation*, *neologism*, *lexeme* and *institutionalized item* should be seen as denotative of subsequent stages in diachronic development of a word and not as labels permanently attached to a given lexeme, as suggested by Bauer. Moreover, characteristics such as non-lexicalizability or context-dependency could not be regarded as distinctive features of nonce formation, but rather as individual features of *words being at the stage of nonce formation*. This approach will be adopted in the further parts of the article.

¹⁵ Hohenhaus, P.: Lexicalization and institutionalization. Pp. 353–373.

¹⁶ Downing, Pamela: On the creation and use of English compound nouns. In: *Language* 53:4 (1977). Pp. 810–842.

¹⁷ Štekauer, Pavol: On the theory of neologisms and nonce-formations. P. 103.

Let us now move on to a discussion of additional features of nonce formation cited in the literature and to examine how the attitude proposed in this section influences their validity.

2. *Nonce formation as novel lexical creations*

Having established that the term *nonce formation* refers to a stage in a word's development, one has to answer the questions of an appropriate perspective in assessing a given word's status and the aspects of a word undergoing this assessment. This section attempts to analyse the implications of adopting the perspective of *langue* and *parole* in the evaluation of a given word's novelty in language.

As mentioned at the beginning of the previous section, one of the most complex definitions of nonce formation is that of Peter Hohenhaus, including features such as novelty and resulting context-dependency¹⁸. However, including the notion of novelty in the definition of nonce formation requires a further specification concerning the perspective from which a word is supposed to be perceived as new. Is it the perspective of *langue* or *parole*? It seems that in the literature, the perspectives mingle even in the writing of the same author, which is of no benefit for the transparency of the definition.

According to Hohenhaus, novelty of a given creation should be judged in psycholinguistic terms, i.e. depending on whether a speaker coins a word for the first time or retrieves it ready-made from their mental lexicon.¹⁹ This definition, rooted in the idea of individual, psycholinguistic knowledge, introduces an assessment from the perspective of *parole*. However, it assumes the correctness of a full-entry model of mental lexicon and is irrelevant from the point of view of generative morphology. This is because in minimalist approach, all complex lexemes, not being stored "ready-made" in the lexicon but rather being created by means of productive rules from a set of morphemes, would fall within the domain of nonce formation. The issue of the validity of the minimal-entry and full-entry models seems to be yet a matter of a dispute. A more recent study suggests that the structure of mental lexicon might not be described as a mere inventory of either lexical entries or minimal morphological units, but as a combination of these two groups supplemented by an account of lexical frequency derived from the statistical analysis of the occurrence of morphs and morph combinations²⁰. In other words, it seems that mental lexicon stores lexical elements (both lexicalized, irregular lexemes and outputs of productive rules), morphological units and an account of previously encountered combinations of phonological sequences and sequences of morphs, on

¹⁸ Hohenhaus, P.: Lexicalization and institutionalization. Pp. 353–373.

¹⁹ Ibid. P. 357.

²⁰ Baayen, R. Harald: Storage and computation in the mental lexicon. In: Jarema, Gonia and Gary Libben (eds): *The mental lexicon. Core perspectives*. Amsterdam: Elsevier 2007. Pp. 81–104.

the basis of which it may create new formations. The lexicalization of perfectly regular outputs of word formation processes serves as a pattern of detailed combinatorial probabilities, which, in turn, enables elimination of unlikely (though potential) combinations in further word formation²¹. This theory and the fact that there is still some disagreement concerning the nature of mental lexicon make it risky to root a definition of nonce formation in only one (and apparently quite extreme) approach to the subject.

The relation of subsequent stages in words' development should also be addressed in the context of parole / langue perspectives. Hohenhaus draws a line between nonce formation and neology on the basis of lexemes' distribution, as a result of which the division of stages in a word's existence is made on the basis of varying criteria. Nonce formation is to be isolated on the basis of psycholinguistic aspect of novelty, which is a perspective of parole, while neologisms are to be distinguished on the basis of their distribution²² – a thing clearly belonging to a stage intermediate between langue and parole, namely that of norm, which could be defined as a collective realisation of language.²³ In such an approach, there is a name for a stage of a lexeme's life at the absolute beginning of its existence, but the next stage is already that of relative institutionalization, with no reference to what happens to the lexeme in the meantime. Crystal refers to the gap using a term "twice formation", but he seems to be the only one to notice the missing terminology – and as such, he does it only as if on the margins of his analysis²⁴. Hohenhaus argues that the initial development of institutionalization is not observable and therefore cannot be investigated²⁵. Moreover, it should be noted that irrespective of the way we refer to the interim stage in question, the main issue to be solved is that of varying perspectives and criteria for assigning a word to a given stage at a given point in time. While at the beginning these are the nature and capabilities of language as a system that are crucial for a word to be regarded as potential and later to assume its shape, at later stages, where institutionalization becomes a crucial criterion, some extralinguistic factors may become of substance. This is because the capacities of the language system are not the only factors influencing institutionalization. As noted by Bauer, the acceptance of a word may often be influenced by sociological aspects of a given term's reception or even by the attitude toward the person who coins it²⁶. The example of this phenomenon is the word *triphibian*, coined by Winston Churchill and subsequently used in many newspaper publications.²⁷

²¹ Ibid. Pp. 83–84.

²² Hohenhaus, P.: Lexicalization and institutionalization. P. 364.

²³ Lipka, Leonhard, Susanne Handl and Wolfgang Falkner: Lexicalization & Institutionalization. The state of the art in 2004. In: SKASE Journal of Theoretical Linguistics 1 (2004). Pp. 2–19

²⁴ Crystal, D.: Innovation and Lexicographic Coverage. Pp. 219–220.

²⁵ Hohenhaus, Peter: Bouncebackability. A Web-as-corpus-based case study of a New formation, its interpretation, generalization/spread and subsequent decline. In: SKASE Journal of theoretical linguistics 3:2 (2006). Pp. 17–27.

²⁶ Bauer, L.: English word-formation. Pp. 42–44.

²⁷ Ibid. Pp.43.

A possible solution to this problem would be a modification in the outline of words' development introduced in such a way as to unify the eligibility criteria. An alternative scheme based on the novelty aspect perceived from an individual's point of view would therefore look in such a way:

nonce formation → listeme

The stage of nonce formation would be that of active coinage, while the stage of listeme would encompass all the elements previously encountered by a speaker. Because the statuses of possible word and neologism are not dependent on individual performance but rather on the degree of institutionalization, they have been excluded from the scheme. Also the stage of lexicalization, being a sub-type of listedness, has been left out. In this approach, Crystal's example of *chopaholic* would be considered as being at the stage of nonce formation at the point of its coinage by a speaker, while in the case where it had already been encountered (be it in somebody else's speech or in one's own coinage), the word would be classified as a listeme.

The second alternative scheme of a word's development – this time prepared from the perspective of norm – could be presented in the following way:

possible word → nonce formation → neologism → listeme

The first label, namely that of possible word, would include all words that are possible from the systemic perspective, but have not yet been created by any speaker. A nonce formation, in turn, would be a word once created by a speaker, the eligibility for which state would be judged from the perspective of the whole system. The distinction between neologisms and listemes would then be drawn merely on the degree of institutionalization, which would also allow for neologisms to be treated as a subtype of listemes. Lexicalized items are not distinguished here because they may be considered as a subcategory of listemes isolated on the basis of some structural properties. Referring to *chopaholic* again, it could be classified as a potential word if allowed by the rules of a system but not produced by any speaker yet (which is clearly not the case here), as nonce formation on its first coinage ever (judged from the level of a system, not the knowledge of an individual person) and a listeme when it has been institutionalized already.

The second distinction, however, poses a considerable difficulty in practical application of the scheme. This is because it seems to lie beyond the capabilities of human cognition to assess whether a given word is a nonce formation or if it had been produced by some other speaker before. As noticed by Crystal, there are some instances of nonce formation attested by lexicographers, but these are usually formed by recognized writers whose works are likely to be read in the future.²⁸ These are, for instance, Milton's *unlibidinous* or Langland's *unleese*.²⁹ Nevertheless,

²⁸ Crystal, D.: Innovation and Lexicographic Coverage. P. 218–219.

²⁹ Ibid., P. 218.

most instances of nonce formation are not included in referential sources, although nonce formations as such constitute a large proportion of everyday vocabulary. As cited by Bauer³⁰, Thiel³¹ discovered that about 62% of the compounds included in a studied issue of the German magazine *Die Zeit* were not listed in dictionaries. A similar study conducted by Bauer 16 years later revealed that out of 148 compounds derived from a randomly selected pages from an English magazine *Time*, 67 were not included in the OED.³²

Moreover, the criterion for the assessment of institutionalization's degree would then need to be established, which by some is claimed to be extremely difficult. Štekauer³³ argues that the notion is vague and unacceptable because it can be applied only in the case of naming units that have already been coined and – by its nature – not to nonce formation. In his view, the frequency of use is fairly insignificant because what matters is the fact that through nonce formation, language as a system displays its capability to form new naming units whenever a need (be it of a single speaker or of a whole speech community) arises. Štekauer's opinion seems to confirm what has already been proposed in this section – that the subsequent stages in a word's development discussed so far have been isolated on the basis of varying criteria, which stems from the fact that different perspectives have been assumed.

The decision on the perspective of parole or langue in assessing a word's novelty raises a few additional questions that have not yet been addressed in this section. As already remarked by Bauer, a word may be hypothetically coined simultaneously by a few speakers without the knowledge that the item has already been coined by another speaker, in which case the status of those formations as nonce formation is supposed to remain intact³⁴. Moreover, it is not impossible that a speaker, not having encountered a widely accepted lexeme, may create a word of the same form and be convinced of its novelty. The question of linguistic awareness and intentionality of a novel lexical formation, however, is yet another problematic issue. Plag argues that discussing both awareness and intentionality of a new coinage, one has to bear in mind that speakers display varying degrees of language awareness and knowledge.³⁵ The perception of a lexical item may vary from speaker to speaker, even within the same communication act – a lexeme may be regarded as new by a listener, but not by a speaker³⁶. From the perspective of langue, however, such formations obviously could not be described as nonce formations.

³⁰ Bauer, L.: English word-formation. P. 46.

³¹ Thiel, Gisela: Die semantische Beziehungen in den Substantivkomposita der deutschen Gegenwartssprache. In: Muttersprache 83 (1973). Pp. 377–404.

³² Bauer, L.: Morphological productivity. Pp. 36–37.

³³ Štekauer, P.: On the theory of neologisms and nonce formations. P. 101.

³⁴ Bauer, L.: English word-formation. P. 45.

³⁵ Plag, Ingo: Morphological productivity. Structural constraints in English derivation. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter 1999. Pp. 13–14.

³⁶ Guz, W.: Register variation and lexical innovation. P. 30.

The attitude to the problem that will be proposed here constitutes a synthesis of the above described approaches. Having assumed that nonce formation is a term defining a stage in a word's development, it would probably be most convenient to isolate three perspectives in which a word's novelty may be considered, each time specifying the perspective adopted in a given discussion.

The first perspective would be that of a language system. Nonce formation in this area would denote a novel creation by means of which a potential word becomes an actual word. A necessary criterion for a word to be described as nonce formation in this outlook would be that the word be a novelty "in the absolute sense", i.e. that it would be an original, first coinage of a lexeme.

The second perspective would be that of norm – of a collective realisation of language. Here, a word could be defined as nonce formation if it were regarded as such by a substantial number of speakers. A nonce formation in this outlook would not need to be new from the perspective of the system, but from the perspective of the substantial number of members from a given speech community.

The last perspective to be distinguished is that of parole. A word could be perceived as nonce formation from the perspective of an individual speaker if the word has not been encountered or used by the speaker before. Hence, the collective knowledge and the systemic status of a lexeme would be of no substance in the third type of approach.

The perspectives are not to be mutually exclusive, but it seems that for the clarity of any discussion, they should be carefully distinguished. A word could, therefore, be at the stage of nonce formation from the perspective of an individual speaker and a listeme from the perspective of norm, which, in turn, could be established on the basis of statistical data derived from linguistic study.

3. *Nonce formations* as new form and concept creation

The last aspect of nonce formation to be discussed is that of whether by using the term, one is thinking of a new creation purely in terms of form or if it encompasses also some semantic aspects of lexemes. The aim of this section, therefore, is to outline some major issues connected with such a dichotomy and to try to provide a balanced solution to the described distinction.

The question of nonce formation's formal aspects has been discussed by most of the researchers interested in the field. In some definitions proposed by the authors, unusual form is a characteristic feature of nonce formation. For example, Hohenhaus in his earliest treatment of the subject (already mentioned in section 1 of this paper) describes nonce formations as spontaneous formations characterised primarily by context-dependence, deviance from established word-formation rules and non-lexicalizability.³⁷ In a later publication, Hohenhaus suggests that the term

³⁷ Hohenhaus, P.: *Ad-hoc Wortbildung*. P. 238.

nonce formation cover both deviant formations such as *oidy* or *greenth* as well as regular outputs of word formation rules, e.g. *heroid*, stressing the need to separate the two categories and implying that the first one is directly connected to intentionality³⁸.

Not many researchers have rejected the distinction between regular and deviant formations, concentrating on the distinctive features of the two sub-types of the notion. As a result of these deliberations, a substantial amount of space in the study of nonce formation has been devoted to the issue. Apart from the morphological makeup, also speakers' intentionality and awareness of coinage have been regarded as important factors involved in nonce creation. This is because it has been observed that most nonce formations are salient. For instance, Bauer draws attention to fact that new coinages in writing are often marked with inverted commas and supplemented with statements such as "what has been called" or "as it is termed". In speech, an intonation indicating the novelty aspect may be applied.³⁹ The phenomenon described by Bauer has been exploited in Guz's study of nonce formation derived from Internet sources through a Google search of phrases "if that is a word", "if you'll excuse the term" and "if I may coin a word".⁴⁰

At this point let us give some thought to the notion which seems to be of utmost importance, namely that of nonce formation serving a particular communication need. As can be noticed on the basis of the observations described in the previous paragraph, the salience of nonce formation and its coinage takes place during a communication act. It has already been mentioned that Crystal seeks the nature of nonce formation in the fact that it is coined to "meet the immediate needs of a particular communicative situation".⁴¹ In fact, most of the researchers agree upon this matter. Štekauer insists that the function of nonce formation be treated as a response to an immediate naming need, be it of a single speaker or a speech community.⁴² Also Bauer seems to admit that in most cases, a new coinage is created because of a naming need within a speech community⁴³. This need, in turn, may result from an introduction of a new concept or a wish to refresh an already existing one, which, in turn, seems to be a matter of a new concept construal rather than mere modification of productive morphological rules.

Having made a similar observation, Štekauer⁴⁴ introduces an interesting and insightful scheme of interconnectedness between word formation and conceptual level of language. In his approach, every naming process is initiated by an observation of the extralinguistic reality which is to be named. Then, a speaker checks if a suitable naming unit is already present in the lexicon, which here is referred to as

³⁸ Hohenhaus, P.: Lexicalization and institutionalization. P. 363.

³⁹ Bauer, L.: English word-formation. P. 42.

⁴⁰ Guz, W.: Register variation and lexical innovation. Pp. 20–22.

⁴¹ Crystal, D.: Innovation and Lexicographic Coverage. P. 219.

⁴² Štekauer, P.: On the theory of neologisms and nonce formations. P. 101.

⁴³ Bauer, L.: English word-formation. P. 43.

⁴⁴ Štekauer, P.: On the theory of neologisms and nonce formations. Pp. 99–101

Lexical Component. If not, a new naming unit is coined, passing through subsequent stages of the word formation process, in the scheme called Word-Formation Component. This component consists of the following stages: conceptual level, semantic level, onomasiological level, onomatological level and, finally, phonological level. The component in question is argued to be independent of the Syntactic Component, but related to it through the Lexical Component, which stores lexemes. Outputs of the Word-Formation Component, in contrast, are to respond to a specific demand of a speaker wishing to offer a novel idea to a speech community. Thus, nonce formations are outputs of systemic, productive rules, while their acceptance by a speech community determines their possible further influence on the system as a whole.

The theory described above could account for the observed context dependency, formal deviance and non-lexicalizability of nonce formation. By its nature, a novel formation is frequently used to denote a novel concept, which, in turn, is not often instantly spread in speech communities. Therefore, the potential lexicalization of a given form could be connected with the acceptance (or rejection) of the concept it denotes and not, as suggested by Hohenhaus, by a mere context dependency of the form itself. As a result, there would be no need to introduce an additional distinction between possible words and potential listemes drawn on the basis of morphological properties, as proposed by Hohenhaus.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the novelty of concepts that a speaker may wish to convey is likely to be reflected in the morphology of a new coinage, producing the observed stylistic effect of salience. This is nevertheless to be perceived as a characteristic feature of *a word* at the stage of nonce formation, not *the stage* itself. The context dependency, in turn, can be seen rather as a matter of semantic content than of form – a new idea, in order to be conveyed and spread, may need to be rooted in the world experience shared by speakers participating in an act of communication.

Such a terminological assumption yields an additional benefit for the simplicity of the theoretical model. It has already been mentioned that in Hohenhaus, there is an additional term of *nonce use* referring to a listeme deprived of its conventional meaning in favour of a new, context – dependant one, as exemplified by the noun *warhead*⁴⁶. The application of the term in the case of listemes could not be governed by the morphological makeup and frequency of a word's distribution, but rather by the semantic content and contextual occurrence of a given lexeme. When it comes to the novelty of such forms, naming it *nonce use* might cause unnecessary confusion. It seems that the mechanisms of meaning construction in such cases might be sought in the contiguity of two concepts. The intuitive uniqueness of such instances could be accounted for by e.g. metonymy, which perfectly explains their function in language.

⁴⁵ Hohenhaus, P.: Lexicalization and institutionalization. Pp. 366–367.

⁴⁶ Ibid. P. 355.

A brief comment should probably be made concerning the limitations of creativity in nonce formation. It has been argued that the structure of creative formations such as blends, clippings or root creation is unpredictable.⁴⁷ However, in the light of the previous paragraphs a conclusion could be made that the aim of coinage is to facilitate communication, so a speaker's creativity is always limited by the ability of the interlocutor to understand the message. For example, structural study of blends shows that although seemingly unpredictable, nonce formation may be governed by some internal regularities.⁴⁸ Additionally, although Bauer claims that a speaker or listener encountering a nonce formation holds no expectations regarding the meaning of the form⁴⁹, it seems difficult to decide in what way the difference between the context dependence of listemes and nonce formations should be drawn. It seems that the novelty and context dependency of any form is strictly bound to the communicative intention of a speaker.

Discussing the salience of nonce formation, one also has to acknowledge that even productive morphological rules may be a source of lexical innovations. In such cases, it has been observed that speakers frequently fail to identify the forms as novel. As noted by Guz, a word may be coined to fill a lexical gap which is perceived as such by an individual speaker, which may stem for instance from a memory lapse. An example provided in the discussion is the word *uniqueism*, which a speaker coined in place of the existing word *uniqueness*.⁵⁰ Should this happen, one cannot consider such an instance as a case of new concept construal.

Thinking about nonce formation, both in its stylistically marked and unmarked realisations, one may observe a common ground: both types are produced to cover some lexical gap. Hence, different formal makeup of nonce formation seem to result from different types of needs underlying the act of coinage. One common aspect is the novelty of form, therefore it should be argued in this article that using the term *nonce formation*, one refers to the morphological structure of lexemes rather than to their meaning level.

4. Conclusions

The first section of this article has outlined the contemporary approach to the application of the term *nonce formation*. It has been shown that numerous researchers display varying perspectives on the nature of the term: some of them treat it as referring to a stage in the development of a word, while others apply it to the word itself. As a result, *nonce formation* is treated in literature either as a temporary or a permanent label.

⁴⁷ Ibid. P. 364.

⁴⁸ Kelly, Michael: 1998. To 'brunch' or to 'brench': Some aspects of blend structure. In: *Linguistics* 36:3 (1998). Pp. 579–590.

⁴⁹ Bauer, L.: *English word-formation*. P. 47.

⁵⁰ Guz, W.: *Register variation and lexical innovation*. Pp. 21–23.

The conclusion reached in section 1 is that treating the term as denotative of a temporary development stage in words' life is most beneficial as it allows to avoid problematic implications such as inability to foresee the future development of a given word. Moreover, it has been suggested that characteristic features attributed to nonce formation, such as non-lexicalizability or formal deviance be seen as belonging not *to the stage* of nonce formation, but *to a particular word at this stage*. The implication of such an assumption is that the above mentioned characteristics are not related to nonce formation as such, but rather as to individual lexemes.

Section 2 seems to confirm the conclusions reached in section 1. Having enumerated the most frequently cited criteria for identifying nonce formation, which are formal novelty and context dependency, the article proceeds to investigate their validity in the light of the theory described in section 1. It is argued that regarding formal novelty, the status of nonce formation may be assessed according to three perspectives: that of *langue*, *norm* and *parole*. The adopted perspective should be specified in each discussion of the subject, which enables a writer to avoid the ambiguity noted by many researchers. Moreover, it is argued that the perception of a given word's development stage may vary according to an adopted perspective, which stays in close relation to the conclusions of section 1.

Section 3, in turn, addresses the issue of dichotomy of form and meaning in discussing the novelty of a given term, referring to notions such as non-lexicalizability or speaker's intentionality. It is argued that the main function of novel creations is the naming one, and that in many cases, the variation of a new lexeme is preceded by a new concept creation. However, it is noted that some researchers describe also instances of novel creation without novel concept construal. Therefore, it is proposed that non-lexicalizability and context dependency be attributed to individual words (as previously proposed in section 1), and not the stage of nonce formation. The nature of nonceness, subsequently, is postulated to be seen rather in formal aspects of lexis than in their meaning layer.

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