NEOSEMES IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN

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Abstract: *THE EVOLUTION OF NEOSEMES IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN OFFERS A WINDOW INTO THE LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY OF ROMANIAN SPEAKERS AND THE CULTURAL FORCES SHAPING COMMUNICATION. IN A WORLD TRANSFORMED BY DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, GLOBALIZATION, AND SHIFTING SOCIAL PARADIGMS, ROMANIAN CONTINUES TO ADAPT BY TRANSFORMING ITS OWN INTERNAL RESOURCES. NEOSEMES ENRICH THE LANGUAGE BY ADDING DEPTH, NUANCE, AND FLEXIBILITY, ENSURING THAT ROMANIAN REMAINS FULLY CAPABLE OF EXPRESSING MODERN EXPERIENCES*

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INTRODUCTION

The Romanian language, like all living languages, evolves continuously, shaped by the changing realities of the society that uses it. While new words certainly contribute to lexical expansion, a subtler but equally significant process unfolds within the existing vocabulary: the emergence of neosemes, or new meanings attached to established words. This phenomenon—semantic innovation—represents one of the most dynamic forces driving linguistic transformation today. Romanian speakers reinterpret familiar words to express new technological, cultural, and social realities, revealing the remarkable adaptability of the language.

In recent decades, Romanian has undergone an accelerated process of semantic expansion influenced by globalization, rapid technological development, and growing exposure to international forms of communication. These forces have given rise to a diverse set of neosemes that permeate daily interactions, institutional discourse, media, politics, education, and the digital environment. Understanding these semantic shifts offers insights not only into how Romanians communicate but also into how they conceptualize the world around them.

1. Understanding Neosemes: Foundations of Semantic Change

A neoseme is not a new lexical entry but a new meaning that attaches itself to an already existing word. This makes neosemes particularly fascinating from a linguistic standpoint: they enrich the lexicon from within, without modifying the external form of the word. A term that once had a narrow semantic range can suddenly acquire metaphorical, technical, ironic, or abstract meanings as speakers increasingly use it in new contexts.

Semantic change is a universal linguistic process, but the pace at which it occurs varies across historical periods. The contemporary era has intensified semantic innovation due to unprecedented social mobility, instant communication, and the influence of English as a global lingua franca. These condition make Romanian a fertile ground for the emergence of new meanings, which are quickly adopted, disseminated, and stabilized through repeated use.

A crucial characteristic of neosemes is their coexistence with older meanings. The Romanian verb "a salva," for example, continues to signify "to rescue," but in most technological contexts it now primarily means "to save a file." This dual semantism does not generally create confusion because the communicative context clarifies the intended meaning.

2. Technology as a Catalyst for Semantic Innovation

Digital culture is one of the most prolific sources of neosemes in contemporary Romanian. As technology evolves, existing words are repurposed to express novel actions, processes, and states.

The verb "a posta," traditionally associated with mailing or placing something publicly, now predominantly refers to the act of publishing online content. The verb "a distribui," once used almost exclusively for physical distribution, has taken on the new meaning of sharing posts, photos, or information on social media. Words such as "urmăritor," "profil," "platformă," and "comentariu" have all expanded their meanings to describe online identities, navigation patterns, and digital interactions.

These semantic extensions occur naturally. Romanian speakers choose familiar words instead of inventing entirely new ones because familiarity enhances comprehension and facilitates rapid communication. The linguistic economy of the digital sphere—where speed and efficiency are essential—makes neosemes indispensable.

3. Globalization and Cross-Linguistic Semantic Influence

Beyond technology, globalization exerts significant pressure on Romanian semantic structures. English has become a major donor of meanings, not only through (Curelar, 2016, p.18) direct borrowings but also through *semantic calques*—instances where the meaning transfers, but the word remains   Romanian

For example, the word "sensibil" has acquired the English-influenced meaning of "sensitive" in the sense of delicate, controversial, or confidential. Terms such as "motivațional," "conexiune," "strategie," "empatic," and "performanță" reflect conceptual nuances adopted from international discourse. These neosemes signal the openness of Romanian speakers to global cultural models and illustrate how synonymy, metaphorical extensions, and semantic shifts spread through media, education, and entertainment.

In business, the influence is even more pronounced. Words like "vizibilitate," "target," "audiență," or "conținut" have undergone substantial semantic broadening to align with marketing and managerial terminology. Romanian companies increasingly operate in international environments, which encourages rapid integration of new semantic (Manasia, 2020, p.26) layers.

4. Sociocultural Drivers of Semantic Change

Language also evolves to reflect internal cultural transformations. Modern Romanian society engages with new debates on identity, ecology, mental health, diversity, and political representation. These discussions shape new conceptual frameworks and consequently new meanings.

The adjective "toxic," once used primarily for poisonous substances, now describes harmful relationships or workplace environments. The noun "narativ," previously limited to literary and scholarly contexts, has expanded to denote political messaging or ideological framing. Social issues likewise reshape existing words: "vizibilitate" can refer to the social presence of marginalized communities, while "sensibilizare" has become strongly associated with awareness campaigns and activism.

5. Cognitive Mechanisms Behind Neoseme Formation

Neosemes typically emerge through well-established linguistic mechanisms:

Metaphor. Many new meanings (Curelar, M., 2015). arise from metaphorical recontextualization. For example, "bulă" (bubble) is now widely used to describe isolated social, informational, or ideological groups. This metaphor captures the idea of a closed, self-reinforcing environment.

Metonymy. Words expand semantically through association. "Offline," though borrowed, has developed a Romanian-specific metonymic use referring to any activity disconnected from the digital world, not merely the technical state of a device.

Generalization and specialization. Words may broaden their scope—such as "platformă," which now encompasses digital ecosystems—or narrow it—as with "organic," largely associated with natural foods.

Semantic borrowing. Romanian increasingly adopts foreign meanings without altering its own forms. "Empatic," "resursă," "impact," and "mesaj" all demonstrate how international conceptual frameworks reshape native vocabulary.

6. Neosemes in Institutional and Professional Contexts

Specialized fields produce neosemes at a rapid pace because experts constantly need precise terms for new concepts. Once these terms gain visibility, they spread to the general population

In medicine, words like "comorbiditate," "protocol," and "testare" have gained broader meanings through public health communication. In education, terms (Manasia, 2014, p.93) (like "evaluare," "competență," and "curriculum" have undergone semantic refinement influenced by European policy frameworks.

In politics, neosemes often serve rhetorical purposes. "Agenda," for example, no longer means merely a daily planner or program; it can signify hidden motives (Paliță, 2016, p.151) or a broader ideological direction. "Polarizare" has evolved to encompass cultural and social divides, not just political ones.

7. Public Reactions and Linguistic Identity

Romanian speakers display diverse attitudes toward neosemes. Younger generations typically embrace them enthusiastically, viewing them as tools for precision, expressiveness

and global connectivity. Others express concern about perceived linguistic "contamination," particularly from English, arguing that Romanian risks losing authenticity.

Despite such debates, linguists generally adopt a descriptive approach: they observe usage trends before validating new meanings. Once a neoseme stabilizes and becomes widely intelligible, it is eventually included in dictionaries and academic resources.

8. The Cultural Importance of Neosemes

Neosemes are more than linguistic curiosities—they are markers of cultural evolution. They show how speakers negotiate modernity, how Romanian identity adapts to global influences, and how language remains a living organism shaped by societal needs. Through neosemes, Romanian reflects a culture that is both rooted in history and open to innovation.

9. CONCLUSION

The evolution of neosemes in contemporary Romanian offers a window into the linguistic creativity of Romanian speakers and the cultural forces shaping communication. In a world transformed by digital technologies, globalization, and shifting social paradigms, Romanian continues to adapt by transforming its own internal resources. Neosemes enrich the language by adding depth, nuance, and flexibility, ensuring that Romanian remains fully capable of expressing modern experiences.

As Romania continues to engage with global cultural flows, neosemes will remain one of the most dynamic aspects of linguistic change. Their study deepens our understanding of how language evolves and how identity is negotiated through words, highlighting the enduring vitality of Romanian as both a cultural and communicative system.

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