Tech-Neologism

Language is a product of enlightened thinking. As such, one would think the evolution of language would be an open and exhilarating endeavor. However, in the early era of language, neologism was surprisingly lethargic and proscribed. For a fascinating insight into early linguistic expansion, I recommend Simon Winchester's book, "The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary."

In this medieval era, words had to pay their dues and patiently wait their turn before joining the literary league. Pre-modern academic prigs banded together to ward off the invasion of the unwashed word. Conservatism was favored over litheness.

In our post-modern world, the pendulum has swung in the opposite direction. Sports, musical, political, and urban lingo constantly alter, shape, and morph proper language. Who opened the gate for this new era of malleable idiom? Credit the engineers, scientists, and technologists born out of the scientific explosion impelled by two world wars.

Technical jargon turned to slang and slang made its way from military, scientific, and technical circles into the general vernacular. This process has gradually accelerated, reaching terminal velocity with the advent of the computer and internet. Our rapture, frustration, and superstition with technology invigorates a desire to name these new experiences, spawning new language. These new words and phrases are a great source of humor and intrigue. Here are a few techno-neologisms that tickle my fancy.

Let's start with an old favorite, polymorphism: a programming language's ability to process objects differently depending on their type or class. From its early days as the object-oriented world's buzzword of choice, polymorphism has all the makings of a classic word. Any word that starts with poly makes you smile. Morph brings a sense of intrigue – imagine the ability to appear in many forms. Most of our lives are spent changing form – polymorphism is the basis for the entire cosmetic industry. Ending with ism gives polymorphism a sense of permanence and historical significance. Since this is an old favorite, classify this word as a post-neologism.

How about honeymonkey? This sweet, yet playful, word emerged from Microsoft's need to sniff out malicious code. Its predecessor, the honeypot, sits on the Web as a server, attracting client-based malicious code. Honeymonkies take a reverse approach by surfing the net as a client, attracting server-based malicious code. Makes sense to me. You cruise the net offering honey and once you get a bite you start screeching like a monkey. Do you think Bill Gate's wife calls him honeymonkey?

Then there is Ohnosecond, the fraction of time it takes you to realize you have just goofed up, but cannot reverse your action. Around since the beginning of time, ohnosecond credits the premature use of the send button for its ascension to fame. Typically symbolized by putting your foot in your mouth, I am relieved to have a word that covers the situation: keeping my rima oris free of toe jam.

What is a Bi-stable Multivibrator? A flip-flop – the technical kind, not the flip-flops we wear on our feet. The shoe industry had to steal the term flip-flop from the tech industry because the underwear industry stole the term thong. To appease the CROSSTALK editors, I will refrain from further linking of words in this paragraph in any other way.

Gnutella. I love the word Gnutella. Gnutella allows users to share files in a truly distributed manner. However, it conjures up so much more: Marlon Brando yelling Gnutella, Jane Fonda floating in space, Godzilla's next foe, and a punk rock band. It will not be long before the number one name for babies will be Gnutella.

A sophomore favorite is Dag-tag. Dag-tag is an overly elaborate signature, quote, or ASCII art following an e-mail message. You will have to ask your Australian friends what a dag is. You can view dags on sheep as they walk away from you. Out west they are known as dingleberries. In general, undesirable stuff that is stuck in an inconvenient place is a dag-tag. That piece of toilet paper dangling from the boss's backside? Yes, that's a dag-tag.

An easy way to complete this article would be to cover all prefixed words. Words easily named by tacking a technical prefix to them, e.g., e-, cyber-, net-, info- and techno-. To me, that is cheating. However, there are three technical fields that are rapidly merging to form an interesting new field. That is the convergence of biology, information technology, and nanotechnology: Bio-Info-Nano. I propose a new prefix for this technology convergence: Bino-, which rhymes with the city Reno. I predict we will be drunk with its pervasiveness. We will create a game called Bino-, dogs will be named after Bino-, and we will sing about it in pre-school.

Googolplex was a benign scientific term representing the number 10 raised to the power of one googol, or $(10^{(10^{100})})$, which is the number 1 followed by 10^{100} zeros. With the massive popularity of a certain search engine, googolplex now conjures up a new vision: I see a massive cyber strip mall where you can Google and be Googled to your heart's desire.

Have you seen the acronym DSTN on your LCD screen? Do you know what it stands for? Double-layer Super Twist Nematic. This was obviously the inspiration for the cants used to order coffee at Starbucks. Dude, I'll have a Double-Layer Super Twist Nematic Latte, pronto.

My favorite technical word is Electrowetting. I am not kidding. This is a legitimate word and is a promising technology for optical switching networks and focusing lasers. Electrowetting (stop giggling) uses electrical fields to modify dielectric film between hydrophobic and hydrophilic states to shape liquid into an optical lens. Wait, there's more. Electrowetting (you're still smiling) is a subset of a mechanical device called micropumps. This begs the question: Does micropumping cause eletrowetting or relieve electrowetting? I'll let you mull over that.

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