

## A Diachronic Corpus Analysis of English Vocabulary: The Role of Social Media in Shaping Lexical and Semantic Shifts in Language

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*This research examines the lexical and semantic transformation of the diachronic corpus influenced by swift usage of social media particularly in post pandemic era (2020-2024). The research investigates that how evolution, dissemination and spread of new lexical items is fastened by frequent use of social media platforms. This study utilizes the mixed method approach combining quantitative meta level frequency analysis of lexical shifts and qualitative thematic and comparative analysis in order to analyse the semantic change in language. The findings of the study reveal that new lexicons are evolved more frequently because of the swift usage of digital media and post pandemic effects of COVID-19. The new words are spread and become popular by both factors. For instance, “doom scrolling”, “quarantine”, “viral” and “social distancing” are some examples of evolved lexicons. Moreover, the study demonstrates a notable change in the meaning of existing words, such as “viral” and “friend” reflecting the impact of social media and cultural effect on semantic shift. Furthermore, the study contributes in the field of linguistic, teaching and communication strategies by providing comprehensive understanding of language as dynamic and adaptive system. It shows the importance of diachronic studies to investigate the rapidly evolving language in the age of digitalisation.*

## 1. Introduction

Corpus is the collection of large data set of language. Its collection of linguistic data of a language. The corpora have various number of applications such as; they can be used to offer valuable information or a language, it's evolution over time, it's special usage, frequency of certain words used in a particular context or they can be used as a reference for the purpose of comparison (Butler & Simon-Vandenberg, 2021). Diachronic Corpus is the study of collection of large language data from different time period in order to understand and analyse the language development or change over the course of time (Dukić et al., 2025). This study focuses on the lexical and semantic change in the English language vocabulary particularly in post pandemic years (COVID-19).

### 1.1. Background of the Study

The development of the technology has led to significant transformation in the usage of language. Linguistic trends are highly shaped by social media sites. Given the nature of transformation of language due to the challenges in using it in the digital word, there is ongoing transformation in language in terms of lexicons and semantics. This transformation displays the interaction of language, culture and technology. In his book, Bauman (2020) states that lexicon is not a constant element because it keeps changing with societal changes. However, these changes become important and increased in times of digital communication. New words are emerging and become acceptable very quickly due to extensive use of social media and its widespread (Fatimah et al., 2025).

Changes that have occurred in the language historically indicate a change in the society as well and therefore, diachronic corpus is an important research aspect that can be used to understand the complexity of modern use of language (Butler & Simon-Vandenberg, 2021). Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the way people express communication and the words used (Fitzpatrick & Evans, 2021). For instance, never in the history of mankind was such a concept as “social distancing” invented, where people are taught to maintain enough distance to avoid interaction or touching each other. Similarly, terms like “mask wearing” would have been laughed at in previous generations.

Corpora are structured collections of written or spoken texts which become a great source for analyzing a Language. The collections can be of any form of language, ranging from written prose and plays to spoken dialogues, social media interludes, and much more. Corpora therefore not only store the language but also serve as a tool to investigate linguistic phenomena across different contexts. Researchers use corpora to study the use of language, frequencies of specific lexical items, syntactic structures, and the evolution of vocabulary over time (Dukić et al., 2025). Corpora are usually divided into many types, some of them are: general, specialized, and diachronic ones. The General corpora embrace a wide spread of texts within several domains (Fatimah et al., 2025). The specialized ones focus specifically on specific fields, for example, medical or legal language (Fitzpatrick & Evans, 2021). The last type includes diachronic ones, which will be subject to analysis in this paper that contain texts from different historical periods, giving linguists the chance to trace changes during time (Goshu & Ridwan, 2026).

The diachronic corpora, more specifically, focus on the historical evolution of a language (Giulianelli et al., 2020). Diachronic corpora have opened scope to a longitudinal analysis of language. It has been more specific to understand why certain words fall out and in and how new terms are introduced throughout the time. The significance of diachronic corpora lies in their capacity to determine changes witnessed in languages as it is affected by different influences whether social, political, or technological (Herasymenko, 2023). This analysis is basic to knowing how words change as well as the broader culture and societal outlooks that result in such changes. Therefore, in order to understand the interrelationship of language and society, a diachronic corpus is used

In recent post pandemic years (2020 onwards), the language has developed swiftly in the modern technological age, creating a notable gap in the comprehension of ongoing changes in semantic and lexicons of English (Giulianelli et al., 2020). Language is highly influenced by social media and its increasing usage has contributed to a faster rate of transformation of language, leaving the previous researched of language evolution insufficient and outdated (Goshu & Ridwan, 2026). This underexplored area of literature may significantly affects the linguistic theories, teaching methodologies and interactional techniques (Herasymenko, 2023). This creates a notable demand of the study of recent developments in the language and its usage in such domains.

This study aims to conduct a research on diachronic corpus changes in the vocabulary and semantics of English along with the influence of increased technological use and globalization. The main objective of this research is to provide deeper insights into language transformation patterns in this technological era by analysing the evolution of new lexicons and semantic shifts of the lexicons in the course of time. This research provides the insights of language development by critically explaining the complex interplay between language, social media and society. In conclusion, this research will meaningfully contribute to deepen our comprehension of the dynamic character of language and the way in which in affects the human interaction.

This study aims to contribute in the field of English linguistics by exploring the diachronic changes in semantic and lexicons. It focuses on the transformation of language particularly in post pandemic years (after COVID-19) and examine how new words are formed, how the meaning and context is shifted of existing words, and their widespread driven by extensive use of social media. This research contributed in providing critical knowledge of current language treated by exploring the formation and usage of new words after pandemic. In today's era of technological advancement social media act as a significant means of development of new lexical items and their acceptance worldwide, this study provides the valuable insights for understanding diachronic language evolution. Additionally, studying how words have changed their meaning through the influence of society, technology and culture can have implications on understanding the evolving and adaptive nature of language. The results will help to give a lot of knowledge to educators, linguists and communication experts, enabling them to grasp and adjust the fluid nature of the language in human society.

## 1.2 Research objectives

1. To investigate the diachronic evolution of new lexical items in English influenced by social media.
2. To examine the semantic change of words diachronically under the influence of social media, culture and technology.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Diachronic Analysis

In the article, Herasymenko (2023) reminds the reader of the importance of sociolinguistic factors in language development with a detailed diachronic study of lexical changes in the English language. He studied various sources, from the latest digital technologies such as social media and forums to literary works from history. He finds important associations between lexical shifts and frequency changes and their socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location. The study posits that sociocultural and technological factors are interwoven with language change and can shed light on the changes in the vocabulary of English in an increasingly globalized world.

### 2.2 New words and the influence of the digital.

In their exploration of new words in the digital age, Fitzpatrick and Evans (2021) demonstrate how platforms enable a fast adoption of new words. Peters (2016) elaborates that the sources of neologisms are social movements, technological innovation and cultural shifts. Today's language practice is characterised by the co-ordination of language and technology, with digital communication as similar to the production and reception of words.

With significant events of the world such as the COVID-19 pandemic, neologisms are more commonly seen. Expressions like "social distancing" and "quarantine fatigue" evolved not only to represent health measures but also to tint everyday discussion when societal health practices were diligently followed to adhere to health rules. The process in which language evolves to mirror social and collective experiences.

### 2.3 Lexical Change

Lexical change is a key characteristic of linguistic progress. Bauman (2020) has pointed out that vocabulary change is intricately interwoven with social dynamics as well as changes in culture. It should be noted that new realities, technologies, and social norms imply a change in languages within societies. In view of the fact that language is dynamic, it is necessary to use a descriptive approach in studying changes in vocabulary, as also supported by Baker and Ellece (2011). Their study bases its analysis on three main elements: context, audience, and purpose in laying out detailed, multifaceted change in vocabulary development over time.

The reasons that cause lexical change are multifaceted; they range from historical events, social changes, and technological advancements. The advent of new technologies necessitates the creation of new terminologies. In addition, the change of social minds would also necessitate a review and redrafting of current terminologies being used; therefore, researchers need to be aware of them.

## **2.4 Historical Background of Lexical Innovation**

Crystal (2012) describes both how the vocabulary of a language has evolved over time and how it continues. More often than not, it is external features such as colonization, migration, and advances in technology that initiates changes in vocabulary within a language. Ostler (2005), though writing from many historical periods, argues that he has yet to hear a very good reason to avoid allowing lexical choices to reflect new socio-political realities. It is for this reason that vocabulary shifts throughout history say much about the social politics of that time. Analyzing how vocabulary shifts throughout time will yield better insight into the historical forces shaping a language.

The historical background is crucial to understanding the contemporary lexicographic developments. As discussed earlier, the emerging use of digital communication has been facilitated by earlier changes in technology, such as the printing press and telegraph, which further changed the way language was created and consumed. The historical parallels result in the continued connection that has existed over time between technology and language growth.

## **2.5 Register and Genre Variation**

Biber and Conrad (2009) mention how different registers and genres have impacts over time with vocabulary. The authors bring out variation in language over contexts where formal registers can end up having the choice of words different from informal varieties. Informal communication is now better maximized in this digital age; thus, the differences add to the necessity of keeping track of such lexical changes. This aspect is especially important for social media as brevity is mostly associated with the variety, while informality also is common.

Therefore, origin of new genre and register is now social media platforms for instance Twitter and instargam. They provide distinct stylistic properties and distinctive lexicons. These platforms are used frequently for informal communication which allows users to experiment new words in language, slangs and create short forms for easy communication. This practice has introduced new lexicons very swiftly and there common usage has made them widely acceptable and popular in the world, which allows the language to evolve over time. Social media has acted as a tool for linguistic evolution and innovation.

## **2.6 Colloquialisms and Informal Lexis**

Eble (1996) emphasizes on the function of slang in youth culture and the role of informal language in promoting rapidly evolving lexicons. It is because of modern trends in social media that has transformed the communication styles towards more informal approach. People used social media frequently after pandemic and used it as stress coping mechanism. For that purpose they created memes, to lighten the mood and created a safe space for each other, which is why the informal tone became more popular and accepted. Slangs spread swiftly through social media platforms such as Twitter, TikTok and Facebook; this demonstrates the dynamic nature of language and its sensitivity towards effect of culture. More words started to be used as colloquial. In order to create a social identity if group or individuals and their relevance, slangs were used. The formation, adaptation and disappearance of new words have been taken place rapidly and more frequently than in the ancient times because of wide use of social media

and globalization. Therefore it is important to understand the pattern of this change in the lexicon because of the addition or removal of slangs.

## 2.7 Postcolonial Perspectives on Lexical Change

Schneider addresses the matter of vocabulary change within postcolonial states; it is his argument that globalization and cross-cultural contact can influence vocabulary. It is a valuable viewpoint on the varieties of the English language and the interactions between them and how they change to fit the context in which they are used. The wide range of postcolonial Englishes allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the change in language, and demonstrates the language's role in an economy of complex social stratification.

Language is not only used as a medium for communication, but is also a power site and a locus of negotiating identity for postcolonial studies. Various interacting cultures can eventually merge into new words that embody a combination of influences over time that gives rise to the evolution of language. This is essential in understanding these dynamics to be able to value the complexity of lexical change over time.

The literature reviewed in this work confirms that the development of the English vocabulary is a systematic phenomenon reflecting changes in the social, cultural and historical environment and not a random phenomenon. Lexical change is entrenched within the sociolinguistic variables that influence the selection of words, including class, gender, and ethnicity, as they are adopted and obsolete words are phased out (Herasymenko, 2023; Bauman, 2020). But that is all influenced by external factors such as migration and colonization (Crystal, 2012; Ostler, 2005), and also major events involving the whole world, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which requires an urgent linguistic innovation to represent new collective realities. The digital technology and Globalisation have greatly accelerated this development in the modern world. Fitzpatrick and Evans (2021) and Biber and Conrad (2009) both point to the new informal registers and neologisms that have emerged in social media and that spread quickly, even faster than any other medium. They are digital places that create new forms of modern slang and identity markers for youth culture and voices that challenge power and group membership (Eble, 1996; Schneider). In sum, the English vocabulary is an open, living, evolving thing, continually changing to meet the technological and sociopolitical needs of a world that is rapidly globalizing.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes the mixed method researched design. The qualitative research design using a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine diachronic language change over time particularly focusing on lexical innovations, neologism and semantic shift in contemporary English from 2020-2024. Further it was supported by a few descriptive quantitative analyses to identify the recurring themes across selected studies. A systematic review is defined as structured method of identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research using transparent and replicable process (Kitchenham 2004).

The study reviews 10-15 peer reviewed research articles related to diachronic corpus change in language relevant to following themes:

- Diachronic corpus change
- Neologism and lexical change
- Semantic change in digital discourse
- Language evolution in online environment

### 3.2 Data Collection and Sampling

The data was collected from published research articles from sources: Indexed journals, open access articles, linguistics focused academic and social media discourse. The data is aggregated from these domains to provide in-depth analysis of corpus and understand diachronic change in language over time by identifying factors influencing that change.

The study uses criterion based purposive sampling technique of research articles and other linguistics elements for systemic literature review of the selected data.

The inclusion criteria included:

- Published between 2020-2024
- Focus on diachronic language change
- Empirical and corpus-based studies.
- Social media discourse providing language evolution evidences
- Texts contains lexical and semantic neologism between 2020-2024

The study achieves representativeness through sampling from various genres which also reduces register bias in its assessment of vocabulary changes that occur due to technological and societal changes.

### 3.3 Data Collection and Instrument

The data was collected through systematic data base searching using keyword in context (KWIC) search.

#### 3.3.1 Keywords used

*“Diachronic corpus studies”*

*“Neologism in social media”*

*“Language change over time”*

*“Lexical evolution in online media”*

*“Semantic shift of words from 2020-2024”*

#### 3.3.2 Procedure

1. Identifying the correct studies within the inclusion criteria through data base search.
2. Screening of titles and abstracts relevant to our topic of study.
3. Full text review for eligibility and its systematic literature review of in-depth analysis.
4. Final selection of 10-15 articles meeting all the eligibility criteria.

This process followed the structured filtering approach similar to that of PRISMA (Preferred reporting items for systematic review and Meta-analysis). It ensures the smooth filtering and cleaning of the data and helps to extract relevant data effectively.

## 4. Data Analysis Procedure

The corpus data was analyzed for keyword frequency and collocation shifts, while research papers were examined under systematic review for thematic and comparative analysis to explore the themes related to lexical and semantic shift over the four-year time period. The analysis used a mixed-methods framework, integrating quantitative frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation of themes. The detailed analytical procedure is explained below.

### 4.1 Quantitative

#### 4.1.1 Frequency Analysis

The study utilizes Meta-level frequency analysis approach rather than using direct frequency count of the words. The analysis focuses on frequently occurring linguistic trends such as neologism and semantic shifts across selected papers throughout the time instead of calculating raw frequency analysis of the build corpus. The process required locating the recurring themes in texts such as:

- The occurring frequency of neologism observed in various disciplines.
- The social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and online media those are frequently associated with linguistics change.
- The importance of certain lexical innovation types in modern digital discourse.

By identifying cross-study convergence trends, this method makes it possible to identify the linguistic phenomenon that are most frequently associated with diachronic corpus change of language. This study does not create or study corpus in conventional frequency-based analysis which relies on tools such as AntConc or Sketch Engine for direct frequency counts and word distributions. Rather, it summarises the results of previous corpus-based researches and analyses the frequency based on those results. This approach provides the comparative overview of diachronic corpus change from 2020-2024 by demonstrating the most recurrent linguistics features documented in literature.

### 4.2 Qualitative

#### 4.2.1 Thematic analysis of Semantic Change

By emphasizing on semantics and lexical change, this study uses thematic analysis to synthesize findings from a selection of texts on diachronic language change. Each study is closely reviewed to extract insights on word development, meaning change and language use in academic and digital context. After that, these observations are coded to find recurrent themes and trends such as digital neologism, semantic shift, and contribution of social media on lexical innovation. These codes are categorizing to create themes that describe the evolution of meaning in diverse interactional contexts.

#### 4.2.2 Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis will be employed to compare and contrast of the chosen research papers based on lexical and semantic change. This involves comparison and contrasting results, approaches and discourses, specifically social media and academic discourses. This approach will provide insight into how lexical evolution and semantic change vary from one register to another and how digital communication fasten or redefine meaning over time.

### **4.3 Findings**

#### **4.4 Changes in Vocabulary since 2020**

##### **4.4.1 Novelty of New Words**

Neologism has been significantly increased since 2020. Examples of such words are; social distancing, work from home, quarantine, doom scrolling, and cancel culture. The tremendous use of these words not only indicate a response by society to the COVID-19 pandemic but also reflects the changes in language influenced by the rapid consumption of the social media and digital communication. The occurrences of these words in the corpus suggest their significance in modern discussion, particularly in relation to the discourse contain public health, work life balance and social justice campaigns.

These words are emerged as a result of collective effort towards reinventing realities and presenting fresh obstacles in the context of pandemic for individuals and society as a whole. One such word is “doomscrolling”, which describes the coping mechanism for constant bad news on media, suggesting an altogether new approach for consuming media in the period of instability.

##### **4.4.2 Usage Patterns of Words**

The most powerful tool for spreading new trends of words and making them popular is social media. Take the phrase “doom scrolling” for example. The term is defined as an insatiable desire to scan through mobile screen during the time of bad news. People began searching social media for information after every few minutes during outbreak. This word has become more common recently as people attitudes towards information have changed. This pattern uses show adaptability of language to contemporary issues.

Moreover, the meaning attached to the usage of such words allows individuals to gain information about the implications attached to the terms in question. Concerning this issue, the term “cancel culture” has significantly increased the disputes concerning the issue of accountability. These instances reflect how language may entail complex relation of individuals and society. Upon an analysis, conducted through the method used above one can see that social media words are characterized by not only descriptive but also evaluative meanings; in another word they are used to reflect popular opinion.

### **4.5 Semantic Changes**

#### **4.5.1 Changes of Meaning**

The findings reveal that few lexicons have been truly changed in usage and indicate difference in meanings from previous meanings. For instance, the word “viral” is an example of such lexicon, it was first used in context of health issue however now it is used for the content that spread swiftly through internet. So, this is how a word has changed its semantic interpretation over time due to increasing use of social media. And this semantic change is a product of how digital culture influences language and allows words to assume new meanings based on how they are used within these specific contexts.

For instance, the word “friend” has lost its value as its meaning has been propagated along the social networks when it has also blurred the classification of relationships made on the web sites of social media beyond the conventional meaning of friendship.

Therefore, it shows an inelastic growth in terms of the redefinition of social relationship texts of the digital world as more and more people depend on the online modes of communication rather than that of direct, face-to-face interaction.

#### **4.5.2 Factors Causing Semantic Change**

Cultural and technological changes bring semantic alteration. The whole COVID-19 crisis transforms people's communication and imagination related to numerous concepts; thus, one has to readapt one's understanding in response to new facts. Another example of similar impact would be the social movements, like Black Lives Matter-would you believe that words like "woke" change their meaning and usage.

From its inception in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), the word "woke" has itself undergone significant semantic development and even misleading in popular discourses, often used to attack the perceived social consciousness. From these perspectives, the study will clarify the manner in which social and political framework is a key determinant in language evolution, which is essentially a dynamic situation, in which variation in language is associated with variation in society. This implies that any form of dynamics within such frameworks is likely to end up creating polarities with respect to meaning terms that may be liked or disliked depending on different cultural viewpoints.

### **5. Conclusion**

There has been a lot of lexical and vocabulary change in English from 2020 to the present with the focus on social media and societal change. For example, the term "social distancing" was coined and the term "doom scrolling" and "quarantine fatigue" were used recently to describe a new way of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. The other equally important area of semantic change is the meaning changes of the words. For example, 'viral' has had new definitions in the digital culture of today. The ability to quickly spread and adopt new terminology is now key to the functioning of social media platforms. As long as there is no formal communication on the platforms these neologisms can quickly spread and in the longer-term become part of everyday language. From frequency analysis, a clear pattern emerges that language keeps expanding with the emergence of new social contexts to provide the framing of new notions and realities.

Studies of semantic change are also indicative that there are external cultural and technical factors that affect the evolution of language. Woke is an indicator of greater dialogue around social justice and equity. Changes in societal views and ideals have driven changes in word use. The relationship between language and social change demonstrates the need to consider context to understand language vocabulary change.

#### **5.1 The Implications for Future Research**

The key finding of the study is the need for continued research in the field of lexical changes with a particular focus on digital communication. A deeper sense of more long-term trends in vocabulary can be gained from a range of languages and cultures, and then even more complete descriptions of the effects of global phenomena on local languages can be developed. The use of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and learning machines, can tell some of the very interesting stories about future lexical development. The effects of

vocabulary changes on literacy and education should be investigated by researchers. Teachers need to be flexible and adjust their teaching to include new terms and meanings in the rapidly changing language landscape to ensure students' readiness. It requires, in other words, working with students to make them think about the importance of linguistic change in contexts, as well as new vocabulary.

## 5.2 Final Thoughts

It would be necessary to gain a deeper comprehension of the cultural and technological developments. This is a contribution to the growing literature on lexical change that contributes to the knowledge of educators, linguists and communication specialists. We perceive greater insight in the way words are utilized as a living vessel to describe the complexity of the human experience when we acknowledge that language is living.

These developments can only be routinely monitored and evaluated as the world continues to become digital. Given this, linguistic researchers need to be careful when trying to document and understand the language's evolution over time so that all finds are useful in a language that is continually evolving.

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