

TOWARDS THE ISSUE OF LEXICAL CREATIVITY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CHICK LIT

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This article addresses the issue of lexical creativity in English language chick lit, a popular literary genre that emerged in the late 1990s and is characterised by a light, humorous, and confessional narrative style. While previous research on lexical creativity has largely focused on genres that require extensive world-building and referential innovation, such as science fiction, fantasy, and children's literature, chick lit has remained underexplored in this respect. The article argues that, despite the absence of referential necessity, chick lit displays a high degree of lexical inventiveness, primarily serving facilitative rather than nominative functions. The study adopts a qualitative, discourse-oriented approach grounded in contemporary theories of linguistic creativity. It builds on the 4Ps model of creativity (Person, Process, Product, Press) and integrates recent refinements of the creativity continuum, including the distinction between fixed, extended, and idiosyncratic creativity. Particular attention is paid to formal neological procedures, such as derivation, compounding, blending, and conversion, and to the ways in which these procedures are strategically exploited within genre-specific communicative contexts. The analysis demonstrates that neologisms in English language chick lit are rarely intended to introduce new concepts. Instead, they function as expressive and interactional devices that construct character voice, reinforce humour and irony, and articulate social identities and interpersonal relations. The article further argues that formal creativity alone does not fully account for the communicative impact of these neologisms. Rather, their stylistic effectiveness depends on genre expectations, contextual appropriateness, and reader perception, particularly with respect to perceived extravagance. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions in linguistic creativity research by highlighting chick lit as a fertile site for studying non-referential lexical innovation and by proposing a refined model for analysing degrees of formal creativity in literary discourse. The article also outlines directions for future research, including the systematic investigation of meaning-based creativity and its interaction with formal innovation in shaping reader response.

Key words: lexical creativity, neologisms, chick lit, creativity continuum, literary discourse.

Белова Марина. До питання лексичної креативності в англійській чік-літ

Статтю присвячено проблемі лексичної креативності в англійській чік-літ – популярному літературному жанрі кінця XX – початку XXI ст., що вирізняється легкою гумористичною та конфесійною манерою оповіді. На відміну від жанрів, у яких неологізми виконують переважно номінативну функцію (наукова фантастика, фентезі, дитяча література), чік-літ майже не потребує позначення нових об'єктів чи реалій. Водночас у ньому спостерігається інтенсивне продукування лексичних новотворів, що зумовлює необхідність їх системного лінгвістичного аналізу. Дослідження ґрунтується на якісному, дискурсивному підході та спирається на сучасні теорії лінгвістичної креативності. У роботі використано модель 4Р (особистість, процес, продукт, середовище), а також новітні концепції креативного континууму, що розрізняють фіксовану, розширену та ідіосинкратичну креативність. Основну увагу зосереджено на формальних неологічних процедурах: деривації, словоскладанні, блендингу та конверсії, а також на способах їх функціонування у межах жанрово зумовлених комунікативних ситуацій. Показано, що неологізми в англійській чік-літ рідко спрямовані на називання нових понять. Натомість вони виконують фасилітативні функції, беручи участь у конструюванні мовленнєвого портрета персонажів, посиленні гумору й іронії, моделюванні соціальних ролей та міжособистісних стосунків. Обґрунтовано, що формальна інноваційність сама по собі не гарантує комунікативної ефективності неологізму. Його стилістичний потенціал визначається жанровими очіку-



ваннями, контекстуальною доречністю та рецептивними настановами читача, зокрема сприйманою екстравагантністю. Отримані результати розширюють уявлення про лексичну креативність як градуйоване явище та засвідчують продуктивність англомовної чік-літ як об'єкта лінгвістичних досліджень. Окреслено перспективи подальших студій, пов'язаних з аналізом смислової (метафоричної, метонімічної) креативності неологізмів та її взаємодії з формальною інноваційністю в художньому дискурсі.

Ключові слова: лексична креативність, неологізми, чік-літ, креативний континуум, художній дискурс.

Introduction. In the wake of the remarkable success of Helen Fielding's "Bridget Jones's Diary" (1996) and Candace Bushnell's "Sex and the City" (1996), popular publishing saw a significant change in feminist fiction. The genre that came to define this shift is known as "chick lit". It not only expressed a clear post-feminist attitude but also introduced a fresh style of storytelling that is light, witty, and humorous. The brightness, sharpness, and seemingly effortless appeal of these narratives are due, in no small part, to the creative coinage of new words. Whether the heroine is chastising herself for her "hump-ist" attitude toward a physically impaired partner, envying a man who goes to a "face gym", or watching her friends turn into the dreaded "Smug Marrieds", chick lit thrives on new words that are witty, catchy, and sharply attuned to the genre.

Existing research on lexical creativity in literature has predominantly examined genres where lexical invention is necessary for establishing alternative realities, such as science fiction [5], fantasy [7; 14], and children's literature [23]. These genres necessitate the creation of new terms for imagined objects, creatures, and technologies (e.g., *ansible* [17] or *venin* [30]) while also using these terms to convey broader thematic or ideological concerns, as exemplified by G. Orwell's [22] *Newspeak*.

By contrast, no systematic study has yet examined English language chick lit, a genre in which neologisms rarely serve a referential function but instead predominantly fulfil facilitative roles: constructing identities, shaping character idiolect, enhancing the confessional and ironic tone, foregrounding humour, and framing social critique.

This study directly addresses this gap and **aims** at analysing the creativity of formal neological procedures in English language chick lit novels. It builds on pioneering research into creativity in general [10; 24] and linguistic creativity in particular [3; 4; 15; 19; 27], and extends existing typologies of lexical creativity

proposed by A. Lensch [18], M. Norde and G. Trousdale [21].

The outline of research essentials. Usage-based theories of language change highlight the role of creativity in generating new words and constructions that extend beyond familiar linguistic resources [10, p. 61]. However, creativity as a concept remains notoriously difficult to define [28]. Scholars across disciplines frequently remark on its elusiveness, with some even choosing to avoid the term altogether due to its lack of precision [25]. Despite this, numerous attempts have been made to conceptualise creativity in ways that are analytically useful and adaptable to different fields, including linguistics.

One such approach is the 4Ps model of creativity, originally proposed by M. Rhodes [24], which offers a multidimensional framework for understanding creative phenomena. This model distinguishes four interrelated dimensions: Person, Process, Product, and Press. Although developed primarily in the context of general creativity research, the 4Ps model can be fruitfully applied to the study of neologisms in English language chick lit.

Person creativity refers to the attributes of individuals or groups responsible for generating creative output. In the context of chick lit, this may involve the stylistic idiolect of authors or protagonists who coin or popularise novel lexical forms.

Product creativity focuses on the outcomes of creative activity – in this case, the neologisms themselves. These products can be evaluated based on their novelty, formal innovation, semantic inventiveness, and communicative function within the text.

Process creativity examines the cognitive, linguistic, and stylistic mechanisms involved in the generation of novel forms. Understanding these processes allows researchers to trace how linguistic resources are manipulated to produce forms that are both novel and contextually appropriate.

specific contexts. In linguistic terms, usefulness refers to the semantic, pragmatic, or stylistic function the neologism serves. It may address a lexical gap, enhance expressiveness, align with speaker intention, or meet genre expectations. A neologism that is original but opaque, infelicitous, or out of place in its context may be inventive, but not appropriately creative. In the specific case of English language chick lit, usefulness must be understood genre-relationally. In chick lit, in particular, neologisms are rarely coined to denote new concepts; instead, they function as facilitative devices helping to express ironic tone, character voice, social identity, emotional nuance, or cultural commentary. Their usefulness lies not in long-term integration into the broader lexicon, but in their immediate rhetorical and expressive adequacy.

Scholarly approaches to linguistic creativity reflect at least three distinct perspectives.

First, creativity is seen as a result of intentional manipulation of linguistic structures by speakers, consciously designed to innovate or play with language – a process that relies on the hearer’s ability to recognise such intentionality and distinguish it from error [2, p. 290; 29, p. 8].

Second, some forms of creativity are viewed as emerging without speaker awareness or deliberate intent, as in cases of grammaticalisation, where language change proceeds gradually and automatically over time [13, p. 2–3]. A well-known example is the contraction *let’s*, which originated from the phrase *let us* – originally a request or permission (*Let us go*) – but has since grammaticalised into an imperative marker used to propose a joint action (*Let’s go!*), with the sense of permission largely lost in everyday usage.

Third, in generative linguistics, creativity refers to the innate human capacity to produce an infinite number of expressions from a finite set of linguistic resources, regardless of social or communicative context [6, p. 7–8]. This Chomskyan concept of creativity closely aligns with the notion of linguistic productivity – the unremarkable, rule-governed replicability of morphological patterns or schemata to generate new forms within a language system [1, p. 203]. From this perspective, creativity is not viewed as unusual or remarkable, but rather as a normal, inherent aspect of linguistic competence lacking the sense of inventiveness or, as M. Koliopoulou and J. Wilker [6] put it, noteworthiness.

In light of these differing perspectives, there is now a broad consensus that linguistic creativity is best understood as a cline [4] or a continuum [20]: it is not a yes-no phenomenon but rather a matter of degree. A. Bergs [2], relying upon G. Sampson [26, p. 19] and T. Hoffman [12, p. 262], distinguishes F(ixed)-creativity (actions that produce items from a fixed and known range of resources) matching the Chomskyan perspective of the generation of new content forms from a “fixed” range of possibilities [16] and E(xtended)-creativity (actions that produce examples that enlarge our understanding of the range of possible products of the activity). Between these two end points of the cline lie numerous gradient cases that blur the boundaries between routine production and innovative expansion.

M. Norde and G. Trousdale [21] further refined the concept of F-creativity by introducing a distinction between two subtypes: F1-creativity, where coinages are fully sanctioned by an existing morphological schema, and F2-creativity, where forms are only partially sanctioned – stretching or relaxing certain constraints of the schema. Their empirical focus is on pseudoparticiples, but whether this distinction is generalisable to the full range of word-formation processes, including derivation, compounding, blending, and conversion, remains an open question. Further investigation is needed to assess whether the F1/F2 distinction can adequately capture the richness and diversity of neologism formation across morphological types.

Additionally, A. Lensch [18] offered a useful elaboration of possible subtypes of creativity that may enhance this model’s explanatory power. These include: (1) pattern-bending, where a familiar morphological pattern is followed but one or more of its constraints are violated; (2) pattern-extension, where the established pattern is productively stretched to include new, previously unlicensed elements; and (3) pattern-creation, where an entirely new morphological pattern is innovated by the speaker. Taken together, the refinements proposed by M. Norde and G. Trousdale [21] and A. Lensch [18] allow for a clearer mapping of creativity types. F-creativity can be understood as pattern-adhering (corresponding to M. Norde and G. Trousdale’s [21] F1-creativity), pattern-bending (corresponding to M. Norde and

G. Trousdale’s [21] F2-creativity) or pattern-extension innovation, while E-creativity encompasses pattern-creation cases.

Further theorising on the nature of linguistic creativity [16] proposed broadening the traditional F-creativity/E-creativity distinction by introducing the concept of X-creativity where X alludes to both EXtravagance and the notion of the unknown or unpredictable origins of individual linguistic innovations. X-creativity highlights the challenge of explaining how unique, potentially idiosyncratic innovations – originating at the level of individual speaker behaviour – may evolve into socially shared and productive forms.

Hence, following M. Koliopoulou and J. Walker’s [16] proposal of X-creativity as well as A. Lensch’s [18] and M. Norde and G. Trousdale’s [21] refinements on the types of F- and E-creativity, I propose to conceptualise the creativity cline as extending across three interconnected zones: F–E–X creativity, where:

- 1) F-creativity encompasses pattern-adhering, pattern-bending, and pattern-extension innovation;
- 2) E-creativity involves instances of pattern-creation;
- 3) X-creativity is a domain marked by unpredictability and idiosyncrasy. This last type of creativity does not imply greater formal innovation per se but rather signals an epistemological rupture: it points to lexical formations that resist classification, lack reproducibility, and exhibit no clear derivational path.

The creativity cline is illustrated in Figure 1.

Recent theoretical accounts have emphasised the overlap [8, p. 3] or continuous gradation [16] between linguistic creativity and extravagance,

with the latter understood as “any norm-deviating and rule-bending language use that may serve as the entrance door to variation and change” [8, p. 3]. While acknowledging their mutual reinforcement, I align with M. Norde and G. Trousdale [21, p. 8], who argue that creativity and extravagance – despite their connection – should remain analytically distinct. In their model, extravagance is framed primarily as a communicative strategy designed to attract attention, in line with M. Haspelmath’s [11, p. 1055] “maxim of extravagance”: “talk in such a way that you are noticed”. Creativity, by contrast, does not necessarily entail such markedness or salience; it may operate covertly, within established linguistic norms, without overtly drawing attention to form or meaning.

While the continuum view of creativity offers a useful framework for classifying linguistic innovations by degrees of formal novelty – from pattern-adhering to pattern-creating and idiosyncratic cases – it does not fully account for the its communicative dimension – perceived extravagance [21], which is not an inherent property of the linguistic form itself but emerges in the process of reception and interpretation by hearers or readers. This raises an important question for further research: To what extent is perceived extravagance determined by the degree of formal linguistic creativity, and to what extent by contextual and communicative factors, genre conventions and reader expectations? Hypothetically, a form that is formally innovative or highly creative may not necessarily be perceived as extravagant in contexts where linguistic innovation is licensed or expected, such as fantasy or chick lit. Conversely, a form that involves minimal

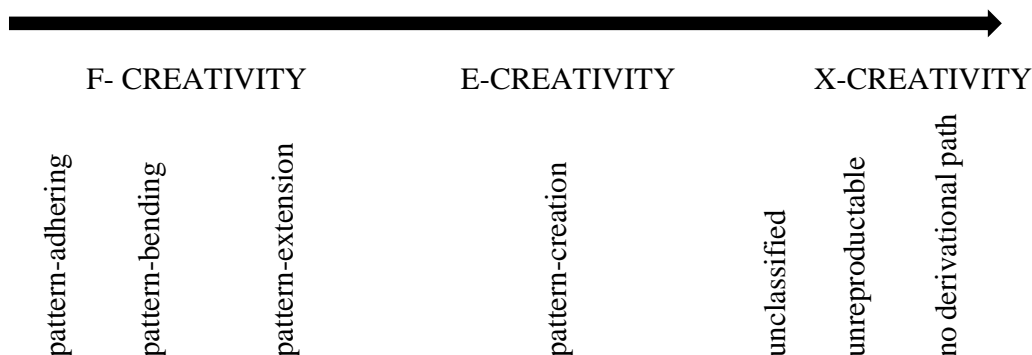


Fig. 1. The creativity cline (amalgamation of theories of linguistic creativity)

Джерело: [2; 12; 18; 21; 26]

creativity in terms of pattern manipulation may nevertheless be interpreted as extravagant if it violates the communicative or stylistic norms of its context. These considerations suggest that extravagance cannot be reduced to formal properties alone, but requires an integrated assessment of linguistic form, communicative intent, and contextual appropriateness.

Conclusions. This article has examined lexical creativity in English language chick lit through the lens of contemporary theories of linguistic creativity, with a particular focus on formal neological procedures. By situating chick lit alongside genres traditionally associated with high levels of lexical innovation, such as science fiction and fantasy, the study has demonstrated that chick lit constitutes a distinct yet equally productive site of neologism formation. Crucially, the analysis has shown that neologisms in this genre rarely serve referential or naming functions. Instead, they fulfil facilitative roles, contributing to humour, irony, character construction, interpersonal alignment, and social commentary within a postfeminist narrative framework.

Drawing on the creativity continuum proposed in recent scholarship, the article has refined and integrated existing typologies of linguistic creativity by conceptualising a three-zone model encompassing F-creativity, E-creativity, and X-creativity. This model allows for a more nuanced classification of neologisms, capturing not only degrees of formal innovation but also cases of partial sanctioning, constraint violation, and idiosyncratic, unreproducible coinages. By incorporating insights from M. Norde and

G. Trousdale, A. Lensch, and M. Koliopoulou and J. Walker, the study has demonstrated that lexical creativity in chick lit operates through a dynamic interplay of pattern adherence, pattern bending, pattern extension, and, more rarely, pattern creation.

At the same time, the analysis has highlighted the limitations of approaches that focus exclusively on formal properties of neologisms. While the creativity continuum provides a robust framework for classifying degrees of formal innovation, it does not fully capture the communicative and interpretive dimension of creativity, particularly the notion of *perceived extravagance*. As argued in the article, extravagance is not an inherent property of linguistic form but an emergent effect shaped by genre conventions, contextual expectations, and reader reception. This observation underscores the need to treat creativity and extravagance as analytically distinct yet interrelated phenomena.

Future research should therefore move beyond formal analysis to explore the interaction between form-based and meaning-based creativity in chick lit neologisms. In particular, systematic investigation is needed into the conceptual and metaphorical motivations underlying formally creative coinages, as well as the extent to which metaphor, metonymy, and other cognitive mechanisms contribute to their perceived expressiveness. Such work would make it possible to assess correlations between degrees of formal innovation and degrees of perceived extravagance, and to determine whether certain types of creativity are more salient.

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