

Onorina BOTEZAT¹

Judit FREIXA²

John HUMBLEY³

Cécile POIX⁴

Ana SALGADO⁵

Giovanni TALLARICO⁶

MAPPING NEOLOGY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

How to cite this paper:

Botezat, Onorina, Freixa, Judit, Humbley, John, Poix, Cécile, Salgado, Ana, Tallarico, Giovanni, 2026, Mapping neology: A comparative analysis of theoretical approaches in the European context, *Theoretical and Applied Linguistics@ro*, vol. II, no. 1, 49-68, DOI: 10.62229/talatroii/1_26/3.

Abstract. This article examines selected key theoretical approaches to neology in contemporary European linguistics, with particular emphasis on the French and Catalan traditions, as well as complementary perspectives from the Anglo-German framework. Rather than treating neology as a self-evident linguistic category, the study argues that the concept of neology is fundamentally theory-dependent, with its definition and scope varying according to underlying epistemological assumptions. The analysis focuses on how different approaches conceptualise the notion of neologism and how they classify lexical innovation. Adopting a qualitative meta-theoretical approach, the study compares five representative frameworks selected for their historical relevance, theoretical complementarity, and academic impact. The comparison is structured around four analytical dimensions: theoretical scope, conceptualization of neologism, functions of neology, and typological criteria.

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, ORCID: 0000-0002-2735-1957, onorina.botezat@rei.ase.ro.

² Universitat Pompeu Fabra, ORCID: 0000-0002-1440-5514, judit.freixa@upf.edu.

³ Université Paris Cité, ORCID: 0000-0002-1759-1156, humbley.john@orange.fr.

⁴ Université Lumière Lyon 2, ORCID: 0000-0001-5981-770X, C.Poix@univ-lyon2.fr.

⁵ University of Porto, ORCID: 0000-0002-6670-3564, acsalgado@letras.up.pt.

⁶ Università di Verona, ORCID: 0000-0002-0585-4473, giovanni.tallarico@univr.it.

The findings reveal both significant convergences and notable divergences. The selected approaches broadly converge on the dynamic, context-dependent nature of neology and the inadequacy of single-criterion definitions. However, they differ substantially in their delimitation of what counts as a neologism, their analytical focus – ranging from product to process to discourse – and their typology models. The evolution of neological studies is interpreted as a gradual shift from structurally oriented and product-based models toward more dynamic, usage-based, and discursive perspectives. This shift reflects a broader tendency in linguistics to integrate cognitive, social, and pragmatic dimensions into the analysis of language. The article concludes that a comprehensive understanding of neology requires an integrative framework capable of accommodating its multidimensional and evolving nature.

Keywords: neology, lexical innovation, neologism, neological typology, theoretical approaches

1. Introduction

Far from referring to a self-evident linguistic reality, neology is deeply theory-dependent: its definition, scope, and units of analysis vary according to the framework that determines what counts as “new,” for whom, and under which conditions. As Jean-François Sablayrolles (2019: 9) aptly observes, “*It is strange to reflect that language studies have taken so long to invent terms designating the concepts of neology.*” (o.t.) This remark not only points to the relatively recent consolidation of neology as a field, but also highlights the persistent terminological instability that continues to shape it. In this sense, neologism is best understood not as a fixed category, but as an interpretative lens through which lexical innovation is observed and systematised.

At the same time, most contemporary approaches converge on a key assumption: neology is a dynamic, usage-based phenomenon intrinsically linked to the ongoing renewal of the lexicon. From this perspective, neologisms are not anomalies at the margins of the system, but natural and necessary manifestations of linguistic vitality. They emerge from actual language use, circulate within discourse, and contribute to the continuous updating of the lexicon in response to communicative, social, and cultural needs.

However, the attempt to describe and classify neologisms reveals important methodological tensions. Classifications designed for applied purposes often prove insufficient: on the one hand, the fluid and complex nature of neological phenomena tends to challenge rigid taxonomies; on the other, the multidimensionality of lexical innovation contrasts with the largely unidimensional character of most typology models, which prioritise usage productivity over theoretical completeness. It is precisely within this context that initiatives such as ENEOLI⁷ (European Network on Lexical Innovation, COST Action 22126) emerge. ENEOLI builds on the need to clarify and systematise the conceptual and terminological foundations of the field, developing a program that seeks to provide a glossary⁸

⁷ <https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA22126/>; <https://eneoli.eu/>

⁸ <https://eneoli.wikibase.cloud/wiki/NeoVoc/>

of neological terms – where no fully unified multilingual framework has yet been established – and to account for the terminology of neology across a wide range of languages. By doing so, it aims to reduce ambiguity, foster comparability, and support cumulative research in neology.

Against this background, this article compares the selected theoretical approaches that have played a particularly influential role in European neology studies, with particular attention to the traditions developed in France and Catalonia over recent decades, and, to a lesser extent, in the Anglo-German context. Rather than proposing a new typology of neologisms, this article maps the epistemological assumptions underlying selected theoretical approaches and examines how they define, delimit, and classify neological phenomena. The article first reviews the selected approaches, then presents the comparative methodology, and finally discusses convergences and divergences across the analytical dimensions proposed.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. General considerations

Any attempt to define neology necessarily presupposes an underlying conception of *language* and, consequently, of what counts as a legitimate object of linguistic analysis. A central issue concerns the scope of the phenomenon: should neology be restricted to the study of newly formed lexical items that conform to the regular patterns of a given word-formation system, or should it also encompass more marginal, creative, or less system-bound manifestations of linguistic innovation? As Crystal (1990: 13) points out, “linguistic strangeness is, in fact, a perfectly normal, everyday occurrence.” From this perspective, phenomena such as scat singing, glossolalia, expletives produced in sudden emotional states, or forms of “baby talk” used in intimate interaction (Crystal 1990: 15) illustrate that deviations from standard norms are not peripheral anomalies but inherent features of language use. Similarly, encoded varieties such as Cockney rhyming slang, Pig Latin, leet speak, or more recent forms like algospeak demonstrate the extent to which linguistic creativity operates beyond canonical systems. These examples are not all neological in the strict sense, but they illustrate the difficulty of drawing stable boundaries around linguistic innovation.

Literary language further expands the boundaries of neology. In genres where nonsense or language play is central, the possibilities of stretching and reshaping linguistic forms are limitless. Literary creations also anticipate conceptual innovations, as authors coin terms for entities or ideas that may not yet have an extralinguistic counterpart. This observation reinforces the need to consider neology as a phenomenon that cannot be fully circumscribed by strictly formal or system-internal criteria.

Despite this apparent heterogeneity, not all aspects of neology pose the same degree of theoretical difficulty. A preliminary survey of recent studies in French neology (Salgado, Silva, Humbley 2025) suggests that a large proportion of the terminology employed and validated by experts is inherited from general linguistics. Fundamental notions such as affixation, compounding, blending, metaphor, or metonymy belong to well-established domains such as morphology and semantics. While these concepts may themselves be subject to debate, particularly with regard to boundary cases such as the distinction between derivation and compounding, such discussions fall within the scope of general linguistic theory rather than neology as a distinct field.

This does not imply, however, that these notions can be taken for granted in neological research. On the contrary, their explicit definition is essential to ensure analytical consistency. For instance, studies dealing with blends require a shared understanding of what constitutes a *root* or a *stem*, as divergences at this level may lead to incompatible analyses. In this sense, neology relies on the conceptual apparatus of linguistics while simultaneously testing its limits, especially when confronted with complex or borderline phenomena.

A further source of variation lies in the diversity of analytical perspectives adopted within neology. Different approaches may focus on distinct dimensions of the phenomenon, which in turn leads to divergent classification frameworks. Some typologies aim to account for the formal and semantic mechanisms involved in the creation of neologisms, emphasising processes such as derivation, compounding, or semantic shift. Others prioritise the study of their diffusion, stabilisation, and eventual integration into the lexicon. Consequently, apparent inconsistencies between classifications often stem less from incompatible theoretical assumptions than from differences in scope and analytical objectives. Recognising this distinction is essential for any meaningful comparison of theoretical models.

The following section outlines the principal approaches to neology considered in this study and provides the basis for their subsequent comparison.

2.2. Theoretical approaches to neology revisited

2.2.1 The French tradition

Though only theorised relatively recently, the subject of neology has been a topic of reflection on language in France at least since the eighteenth century. The various approaches adopted over the years have left their mark on how neology is approached today by both linguists and French speakers in general. It may be argued that francophone contexts display a particularly strong awareness of neology, often framed in relation to linguistic normativity and to the question of which innovations are considered acceptable.

In recent times, since the end of the Second World War, several sometimes-conflicting initiatives regarding neology can be noted, in particular political and

academic. On the one hand, a large-scale language-planning organisation was set up in the framework of what is now known as the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* (DGLFLF) with the task of finding new words in French to replace or even anticipate borrowings from English (Humbley 2025). This was termed neology *in vitro* by the sociolinguist Louis-Jean Calvet (1993), in contrast to neology *in vivo*, new words in the wild. This push towards a dynamic language policy, promoting neology, led to strong collaboration with other French-speaking communities, in particular with Quebec, where the *Office (québécois) de la langue française* (OLF; later OQLF) was responsible for restoring French as the language of the workplace, entailing pro-active term creation, known as *néonymie*. This vast language planning project had several repercussions concerning neology: on the one hand the OLF served as a model for Maria Teresa Cabré's conception of TERMCAT, and on the other the activities stimulated linguistic research in neology, as international conferences were organised in the 1970s and language planners from the OLF took up positions at university level, in particular Jean-Claude Boulanger, who devoted much of his academic career to the subject of neology⁹.

Academic activity in France on neology was intense and varied, in particular in the 1970s. On the one hand, neology was one of the components of the largest language project of the post war era, the flagship being the heritage dictionary, *Le Trésor de la langue française*. This 16-volume work was originally intended to have a neology section, and to complement an already existing stock of neologisms. A team of language engineers, under the direction of Bernard Quemada, created card indices with neologisms culled systematically from the press. This was the origin of the neology observatories both in France and abroad, supervised by Gabrielle Quemada. These provided the model for Maria Teresa Cabré's neology observatories some twenty years later. The linguistic orientation of these initiatives can be fairly placed in the framework of lexicography. The assumption was that new words that turned up in discourse (here the press) were candidates to enter the lexicon of the language at some later stage. Words counted as new if they did not figure in the latest dictionary, the so-called exclusion corpus (*corpus d'exclusion*).

Opposing this lexical stance was a group of linguists from the Université Paris X Nanterre. Under the leadership of Louis Guilbert (1975), a team of linguists, working in close cooperation with sociolinguists (notably Jean-Baptiste Marcellesi) approached neology from two very different angles, one being generative grammar (which posited neology as an expression of the generative capacity of language) and the other the history of technologies as mirrored by the new terms that expressed them, in Guilbert's case aviation (Guilbert 1966) and space engineering (Guilbert 1967). Neology was also characterised in this framework by deviation from the dominant norm, that of a particular social class. This entailed some detailed discourse analysis putting evidence of neology in an interpretive context (Gardin 1989). These linguists (Gardin et al. 1974) also

⁹ <https://boulanger.recherche.usherbrooke.ca/>

explored the notion of the “feeling of neology” (*sentiment néologique*) taken up later and refined by Jean-François Sablayrolles (2013). The Nanterre approach to neology was intended to contrast with official language planning initiatives and was adopted when many of the linguists took up postings in Rouen and created socioterminology.

What is termed here the French approach is essentially the work of Jean-François Sablayrolles, who revitalised neology studies on completing his thesis in 1996 (Humbley 2021). It should be pointed out that at this time, neology had been marginalised by linguists who did not recognise it as a useful concept in language theory. The linguist who first may have qualified neology as a pseudo concept was Bernard Gardin (1974), one of the most active members of the Nanterre group. This challenge was taken up by lexicographer Alain Rey (1976), who argued that neology is a pragmatic concept to be defined in relation to surrounding concepts (*language, word, novelty...*). This pragmatic understanding was later developed in Sablayrolles’s work.

The best-known feature of Sablayrolles’s research is his typology of what he terms lexicogenic matrices (Sablayrolles 2019: 85-97). This concept is taken from Jean Tournier (1985) who developed a grid of matrices to account for word formation in contemporary English. Sablayrolles (*ibid.*) adapted this to French and included it in a review of more than 100 typologies which he analysed and compared. This matrix system is generally what is highlighted in the contemporary context when mention is made of the “French” approach. It should therefore be understood as the latest phase of development of what is a continuously evolving analytical framework.

2.2.2 The Catalan tradition

Research on neology in Catalonia, while sharing certain affinities with the French tradition, has developed its own distinctive orientation, characterised by strong empirical grounding and sustained methodological rigour. This tradition began with the creation of the Observatori de Neologia in Barcelona by Maria Teresa Cabré in 1988. During its initial phase, the Observatory focused on establishing systematic methodologies for detecting neologisms in the press, with the explicit aim of contributing to lexicographic updating and language planning. As a result, early work was predominantly descriptive, though it already engaged with the theoretical and epistemological foundations of the field (Cabré 1989, 1990). This line of research developed in parallel with the work carried out by TERMCAT, the Catalan terminology centre, which, since its creation in 1985, has played a central role in terminological neology. While the Observatory adopted a corpus-based and descriptive approach, TERMCAT has focused on the standardisation and dissemination of new terms in specialised domains, contributing to the normalisation of Catalan in scientific and technical communication. This complementary development – descriptive and prescriptive – has become a defining feature of the Catalan tradition.

Over time, this perspective was expanded by incorporating sociolinguistic considerations, emphasising the role of neology as an indicator of the internal vitality of languages (Cabr  2000). This shift led to a more comprehensive understanding of neology as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of linguistic structure, social use, and communicative needs. A multidimensional approach to the classification of neologisms was later proposed, integrating formal, semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic criteria (Cabr  2006), and further work consolidated neology as both a theoretical and applied discipline (Cabr  2015). Within this framework, contributions from the Observatori de Neologia have been decisive. Judit Freixa refined criteria for identifying and classifying neologisms and explored their relationship with linguistic norm and codification (Freixa 2002), while Llopart and Freixa advanced the empirical analysis of lexical innovation and neological categorisation (Llopart & Freixa 2014). Freixa's later work on the neological process will be discussed separately below, since it represents a more explicitly process-oriented development within this broader tradition. Taken together, this body of work reflects a shift toward an integrated framework in which methodological precision, theoretical reflection, and applied objectives are closely intertwined.

2.2.3 *Complementary theoretical approaches*

Alongside these two major traditions, additional lines of research provide complementary perspectives that broaden the theoretical landscape of neology. A first such line may be identified in selected Anglo-German contributions to word formation, usage-based linguistics, and neological conventionalisation, including the work of Bauer (1983, 2004), Schmid (2008), and, more recently, Kerremans (2015). Within this framework, Schmid's socio-cognitive model provides a particularly preeminent account of how lexical innovations become established. His concepts of *entrenchment* and *conventionalisation* describe the processes through which new forms are first internalised by individual speakers and subsequently adopted by the speech community. This perspective shifts the focus from the formal properties of neologisms to the cognitive and social mechanisms that govern their diffusion and stabilisation. Kerremans complements this approach with an empirical methodology based on web-corpora, which allows for the real-time monitoring of the life cycle of lexical innovations. By tracking their frequency, distribution, and contexts of use, her work provides valuable insights into the dynamics of neological diffusion in contemporary digital environments. Together, these contributions promote a process-oriented and usage-based understanding of neology, in which the success of a lexical innovation depends both on its cognitive uptake and on its circulation within communicative networks.

Within the broader Catalan tradition, Freixa's later work deserves separate consideration because of its explicit focus on the neological process and on the

perception of neologicity. Her research can be organised around three main axes. The first focuses (Freixa 2010) on the factors that influence the perception of neologicity, referred to as the *sentiment néologique* in the French tradition. This line of inquiry highlights the subjective and context-dependent nature of neologism identification, challenging the assumption that neologicity can be determined solely on formal or chronological grounds. The second axis explores the interface between neology and lexicography, with particular attention to the criteria that guide the inclusion of neologisms in dictionaries (Freixa, Torner 2020). This work underscores the practical implications of theoretical choices and the need to balance descriptive accuracy with lexicographic usability. In her more recent work, Freixa (2022) advocates a shift from the static notion of the neologism as a discrete unit towards the dynamic concept of the *neological process*. In line with authors such as Renouf (2013), she argues that observing the different stages between the emergence of a lexical innovation and its eventual institutionalisation or disappearance offers a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This process-oriented perspective addresses some of the inherent difficulties in defining neologisms, particularly their temporal and relative nature, and aligns with broader trends in usage-based and dynamic approaches to language.

Finally, the work of Cécile Poix (2018) in literary neology introduces a functional perspective that further enriches the study of neology. In this framework, lexical innovations are not necessarily coined to convey meaning or to respond to a communicative need. The purpose is not to enrich the lexicon but to enrich the text. Following the principle of poetic licence, authors may play with linguistic conventions, distort lexical units, and disregard morphological or semantic constraints in ways that are not fully captured by standard lexicogenic typologies. Neology therefore serves an aesthetic value. Through the analysis of occasionalisms in children's literature, Poix also demonstrates the need to enhance existing typologies with rhetorical devices, namely categories of change involving the deformation – or the encrypting – of existing lexical units or phrases. Her multidimensional typology proposes processes in four categories: word creation, word formation, word deformation and borrowing. This perspective shows the importance of integrating a pragmatic dimension into the analysis of neology. Theoretical models are shaped by their underlying assumptions and objectives. This highlights the need for a comparative approach that considers the formal aspects of neology as well as its cognitive, social, and functional dimensions.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a comparative theoretical review as its methodological approach. Rather than an exhaustive bibliographical survey, we have performed a purposive selection of five representative approaches that illustrate significant shifts in the field of neology over the last decades. The selection of these frameworks was guided by the following inclusion criteria: a) institutional and historical weight:

we included the French and Catalan traditions (represented especially by Sablayrolles and Cabré) due to their foundational role in establishing neology as an autonomous discipline and their influence on lexicographic practice; b) theoretical complementarity: to ensure a multidimensional analysis, we selected three additional lines of research that address aspects often overlooked by traditional taxonomies: the socio-cognitive dimension, represented by Schmid and Kerremans, to account for the processes of entrenchment and conventionalisation; the process-oriented perspective, represented by Freixa, shifting the focus from the neologism as a static unit to the “neological process” and the subjectivity of neologicity; the functional and discursive dimension, represented by Poix, to integrate the role of expressive intent.

The methodological core of this study is a qualitative meta-theoretical analysis. To ensure the validity of our comparison, we structured the process around two pillars: the criteria for bibliographical selection and the definition of comparative axes. The works analysed for each of the five approaches were selected based on their representativeness and academic impact within the field of neology. Specifically, we prioritised: a) Foundational texts: works that established the epistemological bases of each tradition; b) Citation index and authority: we selected the most cited and influential papers and monographs, which are considered reference points by the international scientific community; c) Thematic relevance: we also included recent publications that represent the latest theoretical shifts and address the current challenges of the discipline. No primary corpus of neologisms was analysed; the object of analysis is the theoretical modelling of neology in selected works.

To ensure a systematic contrast between the five approaches, the analysis was conducted using a thematic grid based on four fundamental dimensions: theoretical lens: the underlying linguistic paradigm (structuralist, functionalist, socio-cognitive, or discursive); conceptualisation of *neologism*: how each author defines the boundaries of neologism (formal, chronological, or psychological criteria); functions of neology: the role assigned to lexical innovation (denominative, expressive, strategic, or cognitive); and typology: the criteria used for the classification of neologisms (matrix-based, multidimensional, or process-oriented).

4. Comparison of theoretical approaches to neology

The comparative analysis of the selected approaches reveals differences in the way neology is described and divergences in the conceptualization of the phenomenon and in the epistemological assumptions that underpin it. In this sense, the models under examination reflect different ways of understanding what a neologism is, what should be analysed, and with which tools. Nevertheless, these differences do not preclude significant convergences, which form a shared core within the field. From this dual movement of convergence and divergence, the evolution of neological studies can be interpreted as a gradual shift from

approaches focused on the system and the product toward models that privilege process, usage, and discourse.

4.1. Convergences: the complexity of the phenomenon

A first point of convergence among the selected approaches is the recognition that defining the concept of neologism is difficult. Far from constituting an objective and stably delimited category, the neologism is conceived as a relative and context-dependent reality. This relativity manifests itself at several levels: temporal (what is new at one moment may cease to be so at another), social (the perception of novelty varies across speaker groups), and discursive (novelty depends on contexts of use). Consequently, novelty cannot be understood as an intrinsic property of lexical units, but rather as an attribution dependent on cognitive and socio-communicative factors.

This observation leads to a second consensus: the inadequacy of any single criterion for identifying neologisms. Lexicographic criteria, often used in applied contexts, are recognised as operational but limited, since they depend on editorial decisions and do not necessarily reflect actual usage. Likewise, purely formal or chronological criteria cannot adequately account for complex phenomena. For these reasons, all approaches point, more or less explicitly, to the need to articulate multiple analytical dimensions.

A third shared element is the dynamic conception of neology. Whether the emphasis is placed on the result (as in structural typologies) or on the process (as in cognitive or functional models), all authors agree in considering lexical innovation as part of a broader process of language change. In this sense, neologisms are embedded in trajectories that include emergence, diffusion, possible stabilisation, and eventual disappearance. This idea is particularly explicit in the Anglo-German tradition, but it is also present – albeit implicitly – in more structurally oriented approaches.

Finally, there is also broad agreement on the importance of usage and empirical data. Many typology models, particularly those linked to observatories or lexicographic practice, rely on corpora or systematically collected data and acknowledge that lexical innovation emerges in specific communicative contexts. This empirical orientation constitutes a point of convergence among approaches that otherwise diverge significantly.

4.2. Divergences: object, focus, and scope of the neological phenomenon

If convergences define a shared framework, there are divergences which can be grouped into three main areas: the definition of the object (what a neologism is), the focus of analysis (what is actually studied), and the way the phenomenon is classified.

4.2.1. *What counts as a neologism?*

One of the most significant divergences concerns the boundaries of the concept of neologism. In this respect, the selected approaches can be placed along a continuum ranging from broad and inclusive definitions to more restrictive conceptions. The French and Catalan traditions tend to adopt relatively broad operational definitions, according to which any new unit may be considered a neologism, regardless of its degree of stabilisation. This perspective includes both forms destined to become integrated into the lexicon and ephemeral or occasional creations. This option largely responds to descriptive and applied objectives, especially in lexicography, where the priority is the detection and documentation of innovation.

Within this broader framework, a further point of divergence concerns whether words occurring only once – such as occasionalisms, hapax legomena or nonce words – should themselves be considered neologisms, given their lack of social validation (Pruvost, Sablayrolles 2012[2003]). While some authors question their inclusion on these grounds, Sablayrolles (2019) adopts a maximalist stance, recognising any newly created lexical item as neological, regardless of its circulation or stabilisation. More recently, Humbley (2026) has also highlighted the relevance of this issue, arguing that the status of such formations depends strongly on the theoretical orientation adopted within neology.

By contrast, other approaches introduce finer distinctions. In Freixa's perspective, for instance, not all innovations have the same neological status or the same relevance for the study of lexicalisation. A key criterion is the potential to initiate a process of lexicalization: only those units capable of entering a dynamic of diffusion and stabilization acquire analytical centrality (Bueno Ruiz, Freixa 2020). This implies distinguishing neologisms from other phenomena such as occasionalisms, which may be innovative but are not necessarily relevant from the point of view of the system. This distinction also applies in Poix's approach (2021), where the very notion of new words and the pragmatic functions of neologisms are redefined. From a discursive perspective, one-off creations – including the most ephemeral or playful ones – also reveal the functional and expressive dimensions of language. Thus, the criterion of systemic integration ceases to be decisive, and the focus shifts toward interpretation and discursive effect.

4.2.2. *From product to process: the shift in analytical focus*

A second line of divergence concerns the focus of analysis itself. Here, a clear progression can be observed from models centred on the product to those oriented toward process and, ultimately, discourse. In the French tradition, the central focus lies on the lexical system and, more specifically, on the forms resulting from innovation. The typologies developed within this framework, based on matrices or lexicogenic mechanisms, aim to describe and classify

neologisms according to their formal and semantic structure. This is therefore a clearly product-oriented approach.

Cabré's model maintains this interest in the system but expands it toward a multidimensional perspective that integrates social and communicative factors. The neologism is conceived as a phenomenon involving production, circulation, and reception, and thus cannot be reduced to its form alone. This broadening of focus reflects an effort to overcome the limitations of unidimensional models.

In selected Anglo-German approaches, and especially in Freixa's proposal, the focus shifts toward the neological process. Innovation is no longer analysed solely as a result, but as a trajectory. Concepts such as the "life cycle" of words or the phases of creation, consolidation, and establishment make it possible to describe the dynamics of innovation and to integrate cognitive and social dimensions. Finally, Poix's approach situates the phenomenon at the level of discourse. What matters is not so much the temporal trajectory of units as their functioning in specific contexts. The neologism thus becomes an interpretative event, inseparable from communicative intentions and discursive practices.

This movement – from system to process and to discourse – does not imply a replacement of models, but rather a progressive expansion of the field of analysis.

4.2.3. *Typologies: from lexicogenic matrices to dynamic continua*

The classification of neologisms is perhaps the area where the specific objectives of each tradition, be they descriptive, applied, or cognitive, become most tangible. As synthesised in Table 1, the field has evolved from a focus on the internal structure of the new unit to a broader interest in its functional trajectory and its relationship with the linguistic system as a whole.

In the French school, Tournier's seminal work (1985) introduced the concept of *lexicogenic matrices*, a structured framework designed to categorise neologisms based on the formal outcomes of their creation processes. This model, later refined and updated by Sablayrolles (2000, 2019), offers an internally coherent system for analysing how the language exploits its own resources (internal matrix) or incorporates foreign elements (external matrix). While highly effective for formal description, these matrices have been characterised by their largely unidimensional nature, prioritising the "product" over the "process." Recent contributions, such as those by Antoine (2021), have attempted to extend this framework by emphasising the role of reiteration and slang in the creation of series.

Developing in parallel but with a distinct socio-pragmatic orientation, the tradition led by Cabré and the Neology Observatory has advocated a more flexible, hierarchical approach. This school's primary divergence from the French matrix model lies in its criticism of single dimensionality. As shown in Table 1, the Catalan typology is explicitly informed by applied language policy and lexicographic needs. This perspective culminated in recent efforts to define a

multivariate and functional typology. Within this framework, Cabré, Domènech-Bagaria and Solivellas (2021) integrate sociolinguistic and pragmatic criteria alongside traditional formal mechanisms, allowing for a categorisation that accounts for the neologism's role in terminology and language planning. By expanding the "external matrix" to include complex levels of borrowing, this approach bridges the gap between theoretical description and the practical requirements of terminological bank management.

A significant shift in perspective is provided by the Anglo-German school, which interprets neology as a subset of language change. Rather than focusing on static classification, authors like Bauer (1983) and Schmid (2008) emphasise the temporal dimension of lexical innovation. The defining feature of this typology is the metaphor of the "life cycle" – from the "cradle" (creation) to the "grave" (obsolescence or stabilisation). As noted in the table, this model integrates studies on word loss and cognitive processes like "entrenchment" and "conventionalisation." Here, the typology is less about fixed formal categories and more about the developmental stages of a new word within the speech community.

The contemporary landscape is increasingly marked by an effort to harmonise these disparate traditions. Freixa (2022) proposes a Functional-Cognitive Continuum Model, which moves away from discrete categories toward a scale of neologicity. Her typology distinguishes between ephemeral, ideal, logical, realistic, and variable neologisms, effectively mapping the grey area between a first-time innovation and its full stabilisation in the dictionary. This model represents an integrative approach that addresses the *sentiment néologique* while acknowledging the practicalities of lexicographic usability.

Finally, the work of Poix (2018, 2021) introduces a pragmatic and semiotic dimension that challenges the traditional boundaries of the field. By focusing on creative coinages in children's literature, Poix demonstrates that many neological phenomena – specifically occasionalisms – are not meant for lexical integration but serve purely expressive or playful functions. This discursive perspective reinforces the conclusion that a truly comprehensive typology must account for both the formal structure of the unit and the authorial intention behind its creation.

4.3. Discussion

The comparative analysis conducted in the preceding sections confirms that neology cannot be understood as a fixed or universal linguistic category, but rather as a theory-dependent construct shaped by the criteria through which novelty is identified, classified and interpreted. Far from being a homogeneous phenomenon, neology reveals itself as a complex and multidimensional field where structural, cognitive, social, and discursive perspectives converge, and at times compete. This diversity does not constitute a weakness of the field, on the contrary, it reflects the richness of the phenomenon itself and its relevance for understanding how language functions as a living, historically situated system.

Table 1

Synthesis of selected theoretical approaches to neology

School / Tradition	Main Representatives	Main Focus / Object of Study	Theoretical Orientation	Defining Features of Typology	Context / Notes
Anglo-German School	Bauer (1983); Schmid (2008); Kerremans (2015)	Language change in general (not only neology); includes creation, decline, and obsolescence of words	Functional-cognitive; diachronic	Focus on lexical innovation as part of language evolution; considers full “life cycle” of words	Broader linguistic scope; continuity noted by Freixa (2022: 55); integrates studies like Renouf (2013) and Dury & Drouin (2009); metaphor of “life cycle” (cradle to grave)
French Tradition	Matoré (1953); Quemada (Bernard and Gabrielle); Tourmier (1985); Sablayrolles (2019); Antoine (2021)	Neology itself; structure of new lexical items	Structuralist, lexicological	Classification by <i>lexicogenic matrices</i> (Tournier, Sablayrolles) – later reformulated as <i>lexicogenic devices</i> (Antoine); focus on formal mechanisms of word creation	Originates in the <i>Trésor de la langue française</i> project; Besançon and Villeteuse neology units; linked to Neology Observatories; Antoine adds categories and stresses reiteration (slang neology); internally coherent despite minor variations
Catalan / Spanish (Neology School)	Cabré (2006); <i>Observatori de Neologia</i>	Neology in connection with terminology and language planning	Socio-pragmatic; applied linguistic orientation	Multidimensional model allowing subcategories; analyses types of borrowings (external matrix expanded); integrates sociolinguistic criteria	Cabré criticises one-dimensionality of matrix model; founded TermCat and developed neology term bank; typology informed by applied language policy
Applied / Creative Neology Studies	Poix (2018, 2021)	Neology in children’s literature	Pragmatic; semiotic; stylistic	Focuses on creative, non-functional coinages not meant for lexical integration	Raises question of boundaries of neology (intentional vs. playful innovation)
Contemporary Functional-Cognitive Continuum Model	Freixa (2022)	Patterns of evolution of neologisms	Cognitive-functional; dynamic	Proposes scale: <i>ephemeral, ideal, logical, realistic, variable neologisms</i> ; stresses continuum between innovation and stabilization	Reflects integrative approach across traditions; attempts to harmonise theoretical and applied dimensions

Despite the significant differences in theoretical orientation, scope, and methodology that characterise the traditions examined here, a core consensus can be identified across all approaches. The selected approaches broadly converge in recognising the difficulty of defining the concept of neologism in an objective and stable manner. Novelty is consistently presented not as an intrinsic property of lexical items but as a relative quality, conditioned by temporal, social, and discursive factors. What counts as new depends on who is observing, from which linguistic community and according to which criteria, a point that has been central to the field since the formulation of the *sentiment néologique*.

Equally shared is the recognition that no single criterion – be it formal, chronological, or lexicographical – is sufficient on its own to delimit the phenomenon, which necessitates a multidimensional approach that combines several axes of analysis rather than privileging one.

Finally, all traditions share a dynamic conception of neology, understood as an integral part of the general processes of linguistic change. Whether framed in terms of lexicogenic productivity, life-cycle metaphors, conventionalisation or discursive circulation, neologisms are consistently treated as normal manifestations of a language's adaptive capacity.

However, the observed divergences are equally significant and arguably more instructive for understanding the current state of the field. These divergences are not merely terminological; they reflect genuinely different epistemological assumptions about what neology is, what it is for and what analytical tools are appropriate for studying it.

A first fundamental refers to the very definition of neologism, more specifically, the question of its boundaries. The French and Catalan traditions tend to adopt an extensive view, according to which any newly created unit, regardless of its degree of stabilisation or social validation, may be considered a neologism. This option is largely consistent with the descriptive and applied objectives, particularly in lexicography, where the priority is the detection and documentation of innovation in its earliest stages.

By contrast, other approaches introduce finer distinctions. Freixa, for instance, introduces more restrictive criteria based on lexicalization potential, reserving the status of neologism for forms that show evidence of entering the shared lexical system. At the other end of the spectrum, perspectives such as Poix's shift the focus toward the discursive dimension, where even the most ephemeral creations, occasionalisms, literary coinages, playful distortions, gain centrality precisely because they are not intended for lexical integration. The purpose of such innovations is not simply a matter of theoretical preference, it has direct methodological consequences for corpus design, annotation protocols and the comparability of findings across research groups.

A second key divergence concerns the analytical focus of neological research and the direction in which it has evolved. A clear evolution is observed from product-centred models – characteristic of the structuralist tradition focusing on the formal properties and morphological mechanisms of lexical units – toward process-oriented and, finally, discourse-oriented approaches that situate neologisms within communicative trajectories and social practices. This

progression reflects an expansion of the field of study, moving from analysing linguistic forms to considering usage trajectories and communicative functions. In this sense, the incorporation of concepts such as the “life cycle” of neologisms or their interpretation as discursive acts represents a significant advancement. It allows neology to engage productively with broader developments in usage-based linguistics, cognitive semantics and sociolinguistics, rather than remaining confined to the descriptive morphological tradition in which it originated.

A third divergence, closely related to the second, concerns the typological models proposed to classify neologisms. The analysis shows an evolution from unidimensional models based on formal mechanisms, most notably the lexicogenic matrix model of the French tradition, toward more flexible and integrative proposals. Lexicogenic matrices, despite their internal coherence and considerable descriptive utility, prove to be limited in describing the complexity of the phenomenon. In response, multidimensional models and functional continua have emerged, attempting to better capture the gradual and dynamic nature of lexical innovation more adequately. Freixa’s functional-cognitive continuum, Cabré’s socio-pragmatic multidimensional framework and Poix’s rhetorically expanded typology all represent responses to the same underlying inadequacy: the recognition that a single axis of classification is insufficient to account for the full complexity of neological phenomena.

These convergences and divergences, taken together, suggest that the future of research in neology lies in the integration of perspectives. No existing model, on its own, is capable of explaining the entirety of the phenomenon. The structuralist tradition provides rigorous formal description but struggles with discourse-level creativity and processual dynamics. The Anglo-German diachronic framework captures the life cycle of lexical innovation but tends to pass over the specific linguistic mechanisms of their formation. The Catalan applied tradition offers methodological precision and sociolinguistic awareness but remains primarily oriented toward lexicographic and terminological objectives. The discursive and literary approaches expand the boundaries of the field but risk losing the systematicity needed for comparative research. What is required, therefore, is an approach that articulates formal, cognitive, social, and discursive dimensions in a principled way, and that is capable of accounting for both the structure and the use and function of neologisms across different contexts, registers and communicative purposes. This does not mean dissolving the distinctions between frameworks, which reflect genuine differences in object and method, but rather developing a metalanguage and set of shared analytical categories that allow findings from different traditions to be related and compared. Only from this integrative perspective will it be possible to move toward a more complete and coherent understanding of lexical innovation.

Such an integrative perspective is particularly relevant for initiatives such as ENEOLI NeoVoc¹⁰, which seek to make the terminology of neology comparable across languages and theoretical traditions. The ambition to produce a coherent, cross-linguistic glossary of neological concepts presupposes precisely the kind

¹⁰ https://eneoli.wikibase.cloud/wiki/Main_Page

of theoretical mapping that this study has attempted to provide. In this sense, the present study suggests that the future of neology lies not in the prevalence of one framework over others, but in principled integration of perspectives, an integration that preserves theoretical distinctions where they are analytically productive, and bridges them where shared description is the goal. Only from this integrative point will it be possible to move toward a more complete and coherent understanding of lexical innovation, one that would do justice to both, the systematicity of a language and the creativity of its users.

5. Conclusions

This comparative analysis of major theoretical traditions in neology has pursued three interconnected objectives: to map the principal frameworks that have shaped the field, to identify the criteria through which each defines and classifies lexical innovation and to assess the extent to which these frameworks converge or diverge in their epistemological assumptions and analytical priorities.

The comparative analysis confirms that structuralist traditions such as those of Tournier, Sablayrolles and Antoine focus on the systematic description of the formal mechanisms of word creation. Their lexicogenic models provide a rigorous and internally coherent framework for morphological analysis that continues to inform both theoretical research and applied lexicography. However, as the comparison reveals, this product-oriented focus comes at a cost: it tends to privilege the description of form over the analysis of use and static classification over dynamic process. It is precisely this limitation that other traditions have sought to address. The Anglo-German diachronic framework, most influentially developed by Schmid, reframes neology as a subset of language change, shifting attention from the formal properties of individual lexical items to the cognitive and social processes through which innovations are conventionalised within speech communities. This processual and evolutionary perspective does not replace formal description but significantly enriches it by situating neologisms within a temporal and societal trajectory that extends from their first occurrence to their eventual stabilisation or obsolescence.

The Catalan tradition, developed through the work of Cabré and the *Observatori de Neologia*, occupies a distinctive position in this landscape. By combining applied lexicographic and terminological objectives with a theoretically informed awareness of language change, it has produced a multidimensional classification framework that bridges the gap between formal description and sociolinguistic analysis. In doing so, it has demonstrated that applied and theoretical concerns need not be mutually exclusive and that the practical demands of language planning and lexicographic documentation can serve as a productive stimulus for theoretical refinement. More recent contributions, particularly those of Freixa and Poix, extend this integrative tendency further. Freixa's functional-cognitive continuum model addresses the gradual and context-dependent nature of neologicity, moving away from discrete categorical boundaries toward a more flexible scalar representation. Poix's work on literary neology introduces a pragmatic and

discursive dimension that challenges the field to account for innovations whose purpose is not lexical enrichment but textual and aesthetic effect. These two contributions signal a broader shift in the field: from typologies organised around formal mechanisms toward frameworks that incorporate cognitive, social and communicative dimensions as equally constitutive of the neological phenomenon.

The comparison demonstrates that theories of neology differ not only in their linguistic focus, structural, socio-pragmatic, or cognitive, but also in their epistemological assumptions about what constitutes “newness”. Integrating these perspectives requires a multidimensional representation that can accommodate variation rather than reduce it.

Finally, the conclusion of this comparative, cross-linguistic approach is twofold. First, no single typology suffices to capture the multifaceted nature of neology. Each framework illuminates certain dimensions of the phenomenon while leaving others in shadow, and the apparent contradictions between them often reflect differences in scope and objectives rather than irreconcilable theoretical incompatibilities. Second, and consequently, the most productive path forward lies not in the selection of one framework at the expense of others, but in their integration. A comprehensive account of neology requires a multidimensional representation capable of accommodating formal, structural, socio-pragmatic, and cognitive dimensions, to offer a more comprehensive model for both analysis and lexicographical representation. This is of particular relevance for cross-linguistic and collaborative research initiatives such as ENEOLI, whose ambition is to develop a shared terminological framework for neology across European languages. The present study aims to contribute to that broader collective effort by providing a systematic map of the theoretical terrain underlying the shared ground and the productive tensions, both necessary to understand the field that develops continuously.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article is based upon work from COST Action 22126, European Network on Lexical Innovation (ENEOLI), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

REFERENCES

- Antoine, Fabrice, 2021, Les séries ludiques en argot et en langue familière : saut métaphorique et rebond, *Lexis*, 17, <https://doi.org/10.4000/lexis.5090>, accessed on 02 April 2026.
- Bauer, Laurie, 1983, *English Word-formation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Bauer, Laurie, 2004, *A Glossary of Morphology*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press.
- Bueno Ruiz, Pedro, Judit Freixa, 2020, ¿Son neologismos los ocasionalismos?, in Gloria Guerrero Ramos, Manuel Fernando Pérez Lagos (eds), *Terminología, Neología y Traducción*, Granada, Editorial Comares, 1-20.

- Cabré, Maria Teresa, 1989, La neologia efímera, in *Miscellània Joan Bastardas 1*, Barcelona, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 37-58.
- Cabré, Maria Teresa, 1990, La neologia avui: el naixement d'una disciplina, *Límits*, 9, 47-64.
- Cabré, Maria Teresa, 2000, La neologia com a mesura de la vitalitat interna de les llengües, in Maria Teresa Cabré, Judit Freixa, Elisabet Solé (eds), *La neologia en el tombant de segle*, Barcelona, Institut Universitari de Lingüística Aplicada, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 85-108.
- Cabré, Maria Teresa, 2006, La clasificación de neologismos: una tarea compleja, *Alfa*, 50, 2, 229-250.
- Cabré, Maria Teresa, 2015, La neologia: un nou camp a la cerca de la seva consolidació científica, *Caplletra. Revista Internacional De Filologia*, 59, 125-136, <https://doi.org/10.7203/caplletra.59.6904>.
- Cabré, Maria Teresa, Ona Domènech-Bagaria, Ivan Solivellas, 2021, La classification des néologismes. Révision critique et proposition d'une typologie multivariée et fonctionnelle, *Neologica*, 15, 43-62.
- Calvet, Louis-Jean, 1993, *La sociolinguistique*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Crystal, David, 1990, Linguistic strangeness, in Margaret Bridges (ed.), *On Strangeness*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr, 13-24.
- Dury, Pascaline, Patrick Drouin, 2009, L'obsolescence des termes en langues de spécialité: une étude semi-automatique de la 'nécrologie' en corpus informatisés, appliquée au domaine de l'écologie, *Online proceedings of the XVII European LSP Symposium*, Vol. 2010, 1-11.
- Freixa, Judit, 2002, La dimensió social de la neologia, in Maria Teresa Cabré, Judit Freixa, Elisabet Solé (eds), *Lèxic i neologia*, Barcelona, Institut Universitari de Lingüística Aplicada (IULA), Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 61-82.
- Freixa, Judit, 2010, Paraules amb rareses, *Terminàlia*, 1, 7-16.
- Freixa, Judit, 2022, El proceso neológico, in Elisenda Bernal, Judit Freixa, Sergi Torner (eds), *La neología del español. Del uso al diccionario*, Madrid, Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 51-71.
- Freixa, Judit, Sergi Torner, 2020, Beyond frequency: on the dictionaryization of new words in Spanish, *Dictionaries*, 41, 1, 131-153.
- Gardin, Bernard, 1974, La néologie: aspects socio-linguistiques, *Langages*, 36, 67-73.
- Gardin, Bernard 1989, Machine à dessiner ou machine à écrire? La production collective d'une formulation, *Langages*, 93, 84-97.
- Gardin, Bernard, Gérard Lefèvre, Christiane Marcellesi, Marie-Françoise Mortureux, 1974, À propos du « sentiment néologique », *Langages*, 36, 45-52.
- Guilbert, Louis, 1966, *La formation du vocabulaire de l'aviation*, Paris, Larousse.
- Guilbert, Louis, 1967, *Le vocabulaire de l'astronautique*, Paris, Larousse.
- Guilbert, Louis, 1975, *La créativité lexicale*, Paris, Librairie Larousse.
- Humbley, John, 2021, Hommage à Jean-François Sablayrolles, *Neologica*, 15, 11-14.
- Humbley, John, 2025, Terminology as the key to language policy: The French case, in Rossella Resi, Frida Steurs (eds), *Handbook of Terminology: Vol. 4. Terminology planning in Europe*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 408-429.
- Humbley, John, 2026, Terminologie de la néologie: hommage à Jean-François Sablayrolles, in Ieda Maria Alves, Elis de Almeida Cardoso, Beatriz Curti-Contessoto, Ana Maria Ribeiro de Jesus (eds), *Os estudos lexicais em diferentes perspectivas*, São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, volume IX, 18-34.
- Kerremans, Daphné, 2015, *A Web of New Words. A Corpus-Based Study of the Conventionalization Processes of English Neologisms*, Frankfurt am Main, De Gruyter.
- Llopert, Elisabet, Judit Freixa, 2014, La función de los neologismos: revisión de la dicotomía neología denominativa y neología estilística, *Neologica*, 8, 135-156.

- Matoré, Georges, 1953, *La méthode en lexicologie. Domaine français*, Paris, Didier.
- Poix, Cécile, 2018, Neology in children's literature: A typology of occasionalisms, *Lexis*, 12, <https://journals.openedition.org/lexis/2111>, accessed on 02 April 2026.
- Poix, Cécile, 2021, Études francophones de néologie : complexité terminologique, *Neologica*, 15, 97-115.
- Pruvost Jean, Jean-François Sablayrolles, 2012[2003], *Les néologismes*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Renouf, Antoinette, 2013, The life cycle of words, *Corpus Linguistics Conference*, DOI: 10.1075/scl.57.14ren.
- Rey, Alain, 1976, Néologisme : un pseudo-concept ?, *Cahiers de lexicologie*, 28, 1, 3-17.
- Sablayrolles, Jean-François, 2000, *La néologie en français contemporain*, Paris, Honoré Champion.
- Sablayrolles, Jean-François, 2013, Le sentiment néologique : une compétence qui s'acquiert et s'affine, in Ieda Maria Alves, Ana Maria Ribeiro de Jesus, Luciana Pissolato de Oliveira, Eliane Simões Pereira (eds), *Os estudos lexicais em diferentes perspectivas*, São Paulo, FFLCH-USP, volume 3, 6-20.
- Sablayrolles, Jean-François, 2019, *Comprendre la néologie. Conceptions, analyses, emplois*, Limoges, Lambert Lucas.
- Salgado, Ana, Raquel Silva, John Humbley, 2025, *ENEOLI deliverable 1.3: The drafting of glosses as a mediation for equivalence* (CA22126 – European Network on Lexical Innovation). https://eneoli.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ENEOLI_Deliverable1.3_08.04.2025.pdf, accessed 3 April 2026.
- Schmid, Hans-Jörg, 2008, New words in the mind: Concept formation and entrenchment of neologisms, *Anglia*, 126, 1, 1-36.
- Tournier, Jean, 1985, *Introduction descriptive à la lexicogénétique de l'anglais contemporain*, Paris, Champion.

NOTES

All links were verified by the editors and found to be functioning before the publication of this text in 2026.

The authors contributed equally to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE

The authors used artificial intelligence (AI), i.e., Gemini for translation into English. The authors reviewed and verified all AI-generated suggestions and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the article.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

FUNDING

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License:
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>