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# Morphological Processes in the Political Neologisms Used during Nigeria's 2023 Presidential Election

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the morphological processes of the political neologisms used during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election. The study analyses the formation of new words that emerged before and after the election, and explores how they were created by combining existing morphemes. The research methodology used was a corpus-based analysis of political speeches, campaign slogans, social media messages, and news reports. This research considered words that were popular on Google sites, academic articles, Nigerian newspapers, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook during the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. The study uses qualitative and quantitative methods for analysis by adopting the concepts of word formation processes in English by Krishnarmurthy (2010). Descriptive statistics was used in calculating the frequency of the use of the different types of neologisms. The types of neologisms commonly used are blending, compounding, derivation, and phonetic-orthographic translation. Blending and compounding are discovered to be the most distinct, while blending has the highest percentage of word formation. The neologisms also reflected linguistic, political, and cultural aspects of Nigeria, with some words being borrowed from local languages. The findings suggest that the creation of political neologisms during election campaigns is an important aspect of the Nigerian linguistic landscape and contributes to the dynamism of the Nigerian English. The study highlights the need for further research in this area and its significance in understanding language use in political contexts.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The period of election has always been a period of campaigns and malignments from political contemporaries who are always ready to put up a verbal onslaught on any contending opponents who may not share the same political ideologies and principles with them. Relevant personal history of the contestants are dug out for defamation of characters of the opponents, while encomiums are poured on their allies. Nigeria, the biggest country in Africa with over 250 million people, has been having strong political disputations for a long time among different political groups. Consequently, in Nigeria, elections are usually very intense. Different political parties and their supporters fight for control of power with lots of claims and counter claims about rigging of elections, votes buying, stopping opposition supporters from voting and acts of violence happening. The 2023 Nigerian Presidential race was not just about politics. It was also a platform where new words and expressions were made during the run for office. Prior to the 2023 presidential election in Nigeria, talk about politics had new words and phrases. These new words show the situation in Nigerian politics and how people who vote feel.

A lot of political propagandas are made using neologisms to seemingly attack political opponents. Political contemporaries, often times, choose to capitalize on the incompetence or ineptitude of their opponents to draw conclusions on their political strengths or weaknesses. Words are formed from existing ones in order to capture the ideologies of the teeming followers or the aspirants to the gubernatorial seats. For instance, 'Obidiots', 'Atikulat', and 'Jagabandits' were words used during the presidential election to define the characters of the contestants or aspirants and their supporters. These and many other words were coined and conveniently propagated to castigate or promote rival parties or aspirants. Politicians use their political language expertise as a powerful tool in gaining public backing and political advantages (Hanaqtah, 2019). The neologisms trending since the election increase in either condemning or criticising the dismal performance of the incumbent party in governance and their supporters, especially when the populace is depressed by the actions of

the sitting government. The citizens comment on issues that bother their lives, such as economic, social, security, and the like, using appropriate neologisms that describe the people or government responsible for negative economic and security situations or woes they are presently experiencing. These words and expressions have manipulative power and control people's behaviour and consciousness.

Language can be used for a lot of reasons, such as creating art, communicating ideas, influencing others, etc. Most times, politicians use language to influence and persuade the populace to think or behave in a certain way. This does not exclude the use of words, phrases and clauses that are purposefully created to malign the oppositions' views. The essence is to gain power over people's habits by influencing their thoughts. Language is a tool that uses its form in different ways to fulfill its political objectives. Language serves as a fundamental medium for communication, enabling individuals to convey thoughts, emotions, and social connections. It is a unique human phenomenon that facilitates both verbal and non-verbal interactions, essential for social cohesion and personal development (Laghadze, 2024)

The narratives being portrayed, both positive and negative images, have introduced new terms and, more so, ultimately furthered a political agenda and are toward the opposition. The meanings of these terms are always clear, and they, thus, have a great impact as they speak volumes. Using certain specific words in political experiences is aimed at controlling and holding the audience's attention, impacting their views, regardless of what kind they are, and lastly, leading to a channeled target. The new names, although might not be very apparent, usually tend to circulate among and engage with the people as they harbor an emotionally charged context.

This research considers the creation of new political words or neologisms on social media sites about the 2023 Nigerian presidential aspirants, followers and activities. 25 words from Nigerian users were investigated and analysed. The new words and the processes of formation were investigated. Our findings indicate that

neologisms related to the election are predominantly created as hybrids of existing terms, used to denote new political perspectives or ideologies. This study addresses the gap in existing research by focusing on the neologisms within the Nigerian political context. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the morphological processes discovered in the political neologism used in the presidential election?
2. What is the dominant morphological process?
3. How can we identify the main morphological factors responsible for the production of neologisms in political utterances and campaigns?

### **Previous Works**

Following Peterson and Ray (2013), a neologism denotes a newly devised word or phrase which has just come into general use. Neologisms are words or phrases coined according to the productive word-formation rules in English. They play a very important role in the development of a language. The ability of grammar to generate a multitude of words hinges on adherence to established word formation rules. Raffelsiefen (2015) emphasizes that morphological rules are crucial for understanding how new words can be systematically created within a language, highlighting the role of affixation and compounding in this process. These new words can be incorporated into all the different word classes of content words.

Липириди (2024) claims that neologisms often arise from various linguistic processes, including compounding, blending, and affixation, reflecting the dynamic nature of language adaptation to cultural and technological changes. Similarly, Aimankul et al. (2019) emphasize that neologisms can signify the influence of globalization and digital communication, which reshape social interactions and cultural expressions. For instance, the emergence of digital communication has led to a surge in neologisms that encapsulate new concepts and phenomena, demonstrating the responsiveness of language to societal shifts (Li, 2024). Furthermore, studies support that neologisms can enhance

expressiveness and creativity in language use, although they may also face challenges in acceptance and integration into standard lexicon (Саримсоков, 2024; Сонголова & Солодкова, 2023). Additionally, Zubkova and Burdovskaya (2024) affirm that the role of neologisms in identity formation and social interaction underscores their importance beyond mere vocabulary expansion.

Neologisms serve as a linguistic reflection of societal changes, encapsulating evolving cultural, technological, and social dynamics. Zamyatkina and Belova (2022) assert that the emergence of new words often correlates with shifts in societal values and technological advancements, indicating how language adapts to contemporary realities. Sandyha and Polonska (2023) further argue that the proliferation of neologisms in media and everyday language illustrates the public's response to current events and trends, reinforcing the idea that language is a living entity that evolves with society. Choi (2006) adds that neologisms can also reflect generational shifts, as younger populations create and popularize terms that resonate with their experiences. Lastly, Rautionaho et al. (2020) note that while neologisms can enrich language, they may also lead to misunderstandings across different demographic groups, highlighting the complexities of linguistic evolution. Thus, neologisms are not merely linguistic curiosities but vital indicators of societal transformation.

Boyko (2023) proposes that neologisms in the modern media space are influenced by technological and economic advancements, societal changes, and the need for new vocabulary, including political neologisms within the political sphere. Political neologisms are newly created terms within the political domain, reflecting societal changes and innovations in language. In addition, political neologisms emerge as a reflection of evolving social dynamics, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. Research indicates that these newly coined terms often encapsulate contemporary political phenomena, serving as linguistic markers of change within the political landscape. For instance, Li (2024) highlights how neologisms can arise from the need to articulate new political realities and ideologies, particularly

in response to global events and technological innovations. Similarly, Липириди (2024) discusses the role of social media in accelerating the creation and dissemination of political neologisms, emphasizing their impact on public discourse. Zubkova and Burdovskaya (2024) further elaborate on how cultural contexts influence the acceptance and usage of these terms, suggesting that political neologisms often reflect societal values and conflicts. Overall, the interplay between social life, technology, and culture is crucial in shaping the landscape of political language, highlighting the dynamic nature of communication in the political sphere (Aubakiroba et al., 2024; Alyona et al., 2022).

Language, as the fabric of people's everyday existence and as a living phenomenon that changes and develops as societies change, is as fluid as the tide. Moreover, elections offer one of the best contexts for ideological struggles, where narrations compete and neologisms are born, heated by contact with the political opponent. Algeo & Algeo (1993) assert that every aspect of a person's life is reflected in the words they use to talk about themselves and the world around them. As their world changes – through invention, discovery, revolution, evolution, or personal transformation – so does their language.” Al-salman and Haider (2021), however, reveal that word formation processes are varied to accommodate all possible forms of derivation, with compounding and blending being the most distinct. The Nigerian 2023 presidential election was not left out in this regard and it provided a suitable environment for the study of neologism on politics. This view is buttressed by McDonald (2005), who argues that vocabulary is the living evidence of the change the world tolerates.

Alsalman and Haider (2021) show that the collection of new terms establishes the creativity of the English language to address emerging situations in times of crisis. For instance, Adebayo (2022) identifies the syntactic, morphological, semantic and phonological use of the Covid-19 terms. The result revealed that covid-19 neologisms are formed using nouns, verbs and adjectives. This buttresses Yin & Cheng's (2016) view that the emergence of neologisms in response to social needs highlights their role in adapting language to contemporary

realities, as seen in the evolving terminology within the tobacco industry. However, the proliferation of neologisms can lead to confusion and hinder effective communication, indicating a need for careful consideration in their use (O'Connor et al., 2021).

This integration of perspectives provides a basis before setting out on the quest for an exploration of the interesting role of neologisms in the conduct of the 2023 Nigerian elections. Algeo & Algeo (1993) observe that a community is identified by the language it keeps and its history over time. However, it is necessary to stress that the real value of neologisms is not in attaching them to new theories, but in their practical application. The use of neologisms is not without effect, for it has a comic relief effect. They have the ability to steer what people believe, re-orient their perspective and even sway their votes. Thus, neologisms are not tied to campaign activity alone. They enter the social language and permeate all aspects of the people's speech and perception of politics. Their permanency is yet to be seen; however, the possibility that these linguistic novelties will reconfigure political language and vocabulary is evident. Overall, neologisms exemplify the interplay between linguistic innovation and cultural evolution, affirming their significance in contemporary language studies.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyse the morphological processes in the derivation of new political neologisms during the 2023 Nigerian presidential elections. Specifically, purposive sampling was used for political neologisms that became prominent within the period of time under study. The data were collected from various online sources, such as articles, Nigerian newspapers, and social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, where relevant neologisms were actively used. This study identifies 25 neologisms that gained popularity on social media during the elections. The sample was selected based on frequency rates of usage on social media and acceptance. The selected words were analyzed in light of word-formation processes and their semantic implications. In the process,

questionnaires were administered to social media users to gather responses on neologism recognition, use, origin, perception, and impact. This research is confined to social media discourse because of the focus on political neologisms, which provide a fertile ground for the rapid development and circulation of new terms. Consequently, the words outside the context of social media are beyond the scope of this research.

This research is based on a theoretical framework on morphological processes as discussed by Krishnarmurthy (2010), since it accommodates subtlety in the understanding of mechanisms of word formation across diverse linguistic contexts. The concept recognises three components of neologism: word formation, borrowing, and lexical deviation. The word formation processes involve compounding, affixation (derivation), blending, acronyms, and coinage. The second component is borrowing. This includes words borrowed to serve a

communicative purpose. The third component is lexical deviation. The framework gives an opportunity to look deeper into the processes through which neologisms are integrated into the language, particularly in highly-charged political environments. This typology takes the interaction of morphology with social factors into account, so it is particularly appropriate to analyse the socio-political underpinnings of the neologisms recognised in this study.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS

Each neologism in the data was morphologically processed and grouped according to the process and descriptive statistics was given for the frequency of each category. The objective was to discover the main morphological factors and analyse their significance concerning political utterance and campaigns. The above terms were elucidated within the context of the election to highlight their significance and impact.

Figure 1

S/N	Word	Morphological Process	Analysis
1	agberocracy	<b>Blending</b>	Combines “agbero” (informal term for a tout) with “cracy” (suffix for system of government). Creates a term for a government run by touts.
2	Agbadoism	<b>Derivation</b>	It is a reference to Tinubu’s promise of agricultural abundance, frequently employed by his critics. It has a combination of “agbado” (Yoruba word for <i>corn</i> ) + the suffix ‘-ism.’
3	agbadoist	<b>Derivation</b>	It is a reference to President Tinubu who promised agricultural abundance. It was frequently employed by his critics. It has a combination of “agbado” + the suffix ‘-ist.’
4	Asiwaju baby (Toyin Abraham)	<b>Phrasal Compounding</b>	It combines the title “Asiwaju” (associated with a politician) with “baby” (used mockingly to abuse a supposed Asiwaju ardent follower).
5	Atikulatated	<b>Blending</b>	It combines existing words, “Atiku” and “articulated.”
6	Atikuloot	<b>Compounding</b>	This is a combination of the name “Atiku” + “loot.” which denotes the allegations of corruption against him. It is influenced by the cultural practice of using humor and satire in political discourse.
7	Atikulooted	<b>Compounding</b>	This is a combination of the name “Atiku” + “looted” which denotes the allegations of corruption against him.
8	Biafraud	<b>Blending</b>	It blends “Biafra” (a region) with “fraud,” suggesting fraudulent activities in Biafra.

9	Batified (from BAT)	<b>Derivation</b>	It converts the acronym “BAT” (Bola Ahmed Tinubu) into an adjective with a positive connotation (possibly sarcastic in this context).
10	Eluup (LP)	<b>Phonetic-Orthographic Transformation</b>	This is a blend of initialism, ‘LP, (from Labour Party) and phonological adaptation (epenthesis, initial /e/ and medial /u:/).
11	Emiewele	<b>Blending</b>	Emiewele blends “Emefiele,” a name with the Yoruba word “ewe” (evil). The name evolved as a result of the attitude of the former CBN governor, Emefiele, who played a key role in the scarcity of funds during 2023 presidential election period.
12	Emi lokan	<b>borrowing</b>	Emilokan is a Yoruba expression used by President Tinubu during the Presidential election campaign. It is translated as ‘it is my turn’ to become the president.
13	INECcracy	<b>Derivation</b>	It is derived from “INEC” (Independent National Electoral Commission) with the addition of “cracy” (a suffix for system of government). It creates a term for a system controlled by INEC (with a negative connotation).
14	jagabandits	<b>Blending</b>	It combines “Jagaban” (a nickname for a politician) with “bandits,” thus implying his political supporters who act like bandits.
15	obibest	<b>Compounding</b>	It combines “Obi” (a name) with “best” implying that Obi is the best candidate.
16	obidiots	<b>Blending</b>	It is similar to obigoats; it blends “Obi” with “idiots,” indicating blind followers with questionable intelligence.
17	obidense	<b>Compounding (adjective)</b>	It combines “Obi” (a name) with the English word “dense,” implying that Obi supporters are stupid.
18	obigoats	<b>Compounding</b>	It blends “Obi” (a name) with “goats” implying that the followers are foolhardy.
19	obingos	<b>Blending</b>	It combines “Obi” (a name) with the Nigerian jargon, “bingo” which can actually be used as a derogatory term to refer to a person, often suggesting that they are foolish, stupid, or incompetent.
20	obidients	<b>Derivation</b>	It adds “-ent” suffix (connected with action or state) to “Obi” (a name). Creating a term for Obi supporters which is similar to obidense.
21	politricks	<b>Blending</b>	It combines “politics” and “tricks,” emphasising the deceitful aspect of politics.
22	thiefnubu	<b>Blending</b>	It combines “thief” (noun) with “Tinubu” (a name), implying corruption which creates a derogatory term for the current Nigerian president.
23	vawulence (from violence)	<b>Phonetic-Orthographic Transformation</b>	It adds the informal suffix “-ulence” (an exaggerated abundance) to “violence.”

24	wahaluur (from wahala)	<b>Phonetic-Orthographic Transformation</b>	It adds the informal suffix “-uur” (for an emphasis) to the Nigerian Pidgin word “wahala,” (trouble).
25	yeyebrities	<b>Blending</b>	It blends “yeye” (Nigerian (Yoruba) informal term for nonsense) with “celebrities,” thus creating a mocking term for self-absorbed celebrities.

### Summary of the Morphological Processes

The data reveals the following morphological processes used to create neologisms:

Process	Count	%	Example
Blending	10	40	Yeyebrities
Compounding	7	28	asiwaju baby
Derivation	5	20	Obidients
Phonetic-Orthographic Transformation	3	12	Wahaluur

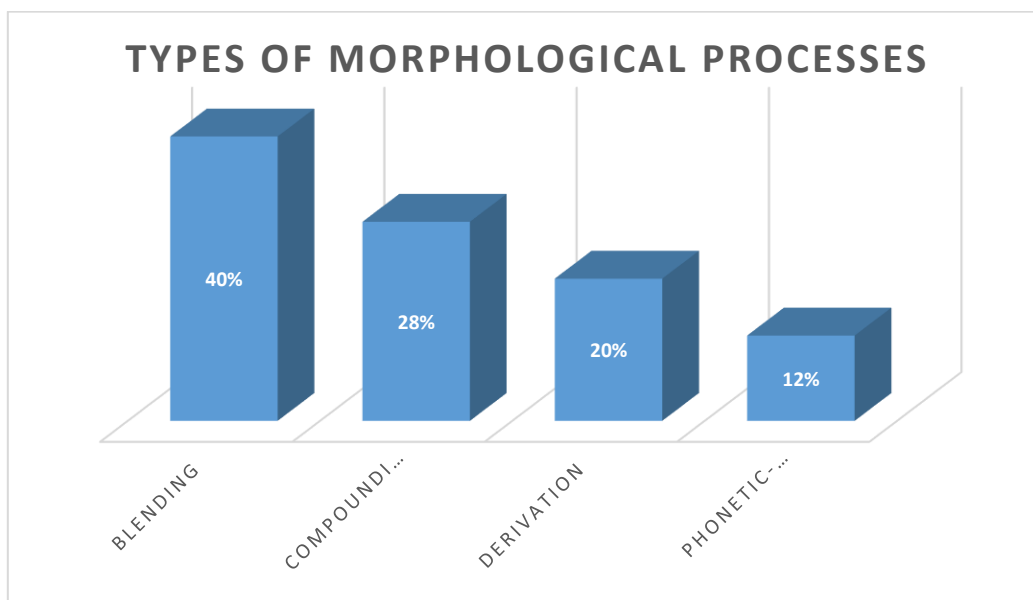


Figure 2

### IV. DISCUSSION

The data provides a range of 26 coined words which mainly originates from a mixture of Nigerian languages and English words, and are analysed based on their morphological processes. The analysed neologisms varyingly express socio-political or cultural connotations; it showcases the dynamic nature of language to express nuanced meanings or attitudes.

The analysis reveals that blending, derivation, compounding and phonetic-orthographic transformation are used in the political neologisms. Phonetic-orthographic

transformation is an additional morphological process devised in this work to capture neologisms not represented in the morphological processes identified by several scholars, including Krishnamurthy (2010). Out of all the morphological processes, blending largely is discovered to be very efficient in forming new words in Nigerian English. This is evident in the graph in Figure 2. It constitutes 40% of the word formation processes, signifying the dominant morphological process. This is followed by compounding with 28% realisation, while derivation and phonetic-orthographic translation

have 20% and 12% respectively. The meanings of the new words entail shifts of meaning, which are considered not surprising due to the evolution of language and its capacity to develop new terms in accordance with newly emerged ideas and norms of culture.

The analysis further reveals that most of the words have negative connotations or sarcastic, and they refer to politicians or people with political affiliations. Some of the words are 'obidiots', 'jagabandits,' and 'yeyebrities.' The data additionally demonstrate how language evolves to accommodate or encode new concepts or ways of viewing the world. Some of the examples include 'vawulence', 'wahaluur,' and 'Eluup.' This observation buttresses Alsalman and Haider's (2021) view that new terms validate the creativity of the English language to address emerging situations in times of crisis. Similarly, in the sphere of politics, taking into account these morphological processes and incorporating scholarly perspectives, it is possible to provide a deeper insight of the mechanisms underlying the formation of these Nigerian English neologisms. These transformations echo the innovative and dynamic nature of Nigerian English, establishing how the language has adapted to local cultural, social, and political contexts. The identified morphological processes are highlighted below.

### **Blending**

Blending is a very important morphological process in the English language. This study reveals that blending has the highest word formation in the Nigerian English political neologism created during the 2023 Presidential Election, with a total percentage of 42.3%. Historically, blending was seen as unproductive, but its role has expanded dramatically since the 20th century, with blends constituting a notable percentage of new English words - up to 43% in some analyses (Yongwei, 2023). This result indicates that blending contributes to the evolution of vocabulary, particularly in response to cultural shifts, as seen in the emergence of terms like "thiefnubu" (thief + Tinubu). This process not only enriches the language but also reflects cultural and social dynamics. This view buttresses Grij's (2022) postulation that blending serves as a dynamic reflection of evolving cultural contexts and linguistic

creativity in English. Overall, blending is a dynamic and productive morphological process that reflects the adaptability of the English language. The combinations of the lexical items in Figure 1 show the creativity and versatility of English in forming new terms through neologisms. More examples include: *atikulated*, *Biafraud*, *emiewele*, *jagabandits*, *obidiots*, *obingos*, *politricks* and *yeyebrities*.

### **Compounding**

The study shows compounding as the second most dominant morphological process, with 28% realisation. The structures reveal societal experiences and changes. Amiruddin et al. (2022) argue that the study of neologisms illustrates how compounding can create new lexical items that reflect contemporary societal changes, with nouns being the most prevalent class. Overall, the morphological process of compounding demonstrates a rich variety of structures and meanings, influenced by both linguistic and contextual factors (Hacken, 2021). For instance, "obigoats" is a single compound, whereas "Asiwaju baby" is a phrasal compound. More examples include *Atikuloot*, *emilokan*, and *obidense*. In other words, two types of compound are discovered. Overall, these studies collectively affirm that compounds are indeed characterized by their dual lexical bases functioning as a unified item.

### **Derivation**

This morphological process is highly productive in Nigerian English, as a large number of derived forms in the data indicates. This opinion is supported by Ogban and Ugot (2023), who claim that derivation is indeed productive, showcasing the language's dynamic nature and creativity. The suffixes used in these lexical items can be seen as expressing the flexibility of the language to co-evolve and produce new forms of words to fit the new ideas. Examples: *agbadoism*, *agberocracy*, *batified*, *INECcracy*, *obidients*. Collectively, these findings underscore the significant role of derivation in shaping Nigerian English, influenced by indigenuos languages and cultural contexts, thus affirming its productivity in the linguistic landscape of Nigeria.

### **Phonetic-Orthographic Transformation**

Phonetic-orthographic transformation is a morphological process in which the

pronunciation and spelling of a word are altered in order to convey a precise meaning, emotion, or cultural relevance. It has 12% realization among the lot. The changes observed in 'wahala', 'violence' and 'LP' are important and involve both significant alterations in pronunciation and spelling. The alterations from 'wahala' to 'wahaluur,' 'violence' to 'vawulence,' and 'LP' to 'eluup' go beyond simple phonetic changes and involve the creation of new linguistic forms. These examples demonstrate how conversion in Nigerian English could become one of the most useful devices in the expression of subtle meanings and relaying sentiments, thus merging into an identity marker. An analysis of these linguistic phenomena will not only contribute to a better comprehension of the nature of the language but also to grasping its dynamic ability for self-adjustment in a changing social and cultural context.

## V. CONCLUSION

The socio-political and cultural reality of Nigeria is definitely influential in the formation of these neologisms, since this is evident in the use of names and local expressions alike. The neologisms observed infiltrate not only Nigerian names, but also Pidgin English words, with the use of 'wahala' as wahaluur. Four types of morphological processes are discovered in the study: blending, compounding, derivation and phonetic-orthographic translation. As discussed earlier, blending and compounding are the most commonly used morphological processes, with blending dominating with 40%, followed by compounding with 28% formation. Derivation and phonetic-orthographic translation came behind with 20% and 12%, respectively.

This discovery corroborates Alsalman and Haider's (2021) view that compounding and blending are the most distinct word formation processes. However, Adebayo (2022) highlighted that compounding and affixation as a process has the highest number of word formation. This attests that the context of the newly created words defines the predominant morphological process. In this study, though some of the neologisms are accounted for by Krisnarmuthy's word formation processes, it does not capture a process whereby the pronunciation and spelling

of a word are altered in order to connote a meaning, emotion, or cultural relevance. Thus, this necessitates the formation of a process considered a "phonetic-orthographic transformation."

The use of blending as the prevalent formation process may not be surprising because Beliaeva (2019) argues that blending serves as a creative linguistic tool, allowing speakers to convey complex ideas succinctly. More so, Gumilar's (2022) work emphasises the cognitive aspects of blending, suggesting that it facilitates easier processing and understanding of new concepts. In addition, Grlj (2022) maintains that blending is prevalent in various languages and reflects the inventive nature of language use in informal settings, such as the social media. This argument also supports Beliaeva's (2018) view that blending can enhance communicative efficiency in informal contexts by combining elements creatively, potentially increasing productivity and creativity in word formation. However, blending is not without its challenges. For instance, Poturica (2014) notes that blending may face limitations in formal language settings, where clarity and tradition frequently take precedence. Also, Kasperova and Smirnova (2022) assert that in informal communication, such as on social networks, blends often serve as playful linguistic tools that engage users and foster interactivity, but can lead to communicative failures without adequate contextual support.

On the one hand, the fact that phonetic-orthographic transformation has been distinguished as a clear process in neologisms in Nigerian English opens up more opportunities in linguistic research because it will extend establishing the frontiers of whether the phenomenon is a sole peculiarity of Nigerian English or widely obtained in some other English dialects or even other languages. On the other hand, elucidation of these morphological processes will also help professionals in political communication, the media, and education as it shows how language evolves to reflect socio-political realities. Overall, neologisms significantly impact public understanding and engagement across various domains.

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