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METCALF'S ASSESSMENT MATRIX AS A WAY TO ASSESS THE VITALITY OF A NEW WORD

Abstract

The article presents a critical analysis of the system proposed by an American linguist Allan Metcalf for assessing the vitality of words that arose at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. By “vitality” he meant chances for a word to remain in use after a reasonable time period, i.e., how new words survive. Every year, a few hundred new words or meanings slip past the barrier and become part of the established vocabulary. Is there any way to predict which ones? The major focus in this paper is Metcalf’s evaluation matrix FUDGE factor as a means of assessing the chances of success for a new word including Frequency of use, Unobtrusiveness, Diversity of users and situations, Generation of other forms and meanings, Endurance of the concept. From these angles, several literary pieces as sources of new words are considered. I argue that Metcalf’s evaluation matrix FUDGE factor, overall, constitutes an accurate measurement tool for assessing the staying power of new words. It is claimed that the evaluation matrix system FUDGE factor has a place in a general system of criteria for defining new lexical units. This is illustrated by a number of examples. In addition, several sources of new words are considered.

Keywords: neologism, vitality of new words, borrowing, FUDGE factor, new lexical meaning.

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