

**STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES
OF NONCE-WORDS IN FICTION BASED
ON THE FANTASY TRILOGY ‘HIS DARK MATERIALS’
BY PHILIP PULLMAN**

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The fantasy trilogy ‘His Dark Materials’ by Philip Pullman is celebrated for its artistic and innovative depiction of the astronomical theory of the multiverse. Thus, the paper focuses on structure and meaning of the authorial creations which denominate unique objects and phenomena and add to the atmosphere of estrangement inherent to a universe with numerous parallel worlds.

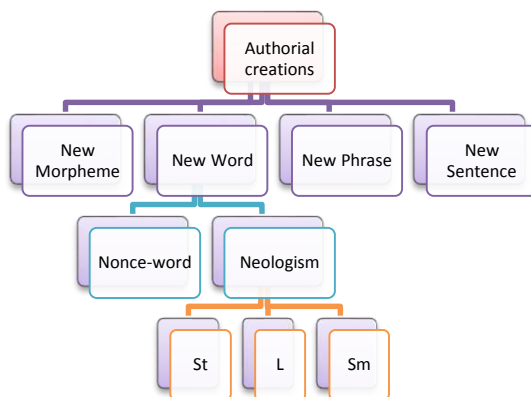
The study of scientific literature revealed various interpretations and lack of unity of opinions regarding the definitions of the key concepts in the field of neology. In addition, since there is no special term in English to refer to novel formations the usage of which is restricted to a literary work and the existing terms do not cover this idea, a more general word combination ‘authorial creation’ was opted for [1, p.94]; it serves as a generic term for all novel formations which appear in a piece of literature and are the stylistic markers of the text.

The terminological basis of the paper could be best presented by the following hierarchical taxonomy (see: Bar Chart), according to which the generic term is ‘authorial creations’, on the next level one may find the basic level terms: new morpheme, new word, new phrase, or new sentence. Then each language category is divided into the sets of nonce-formations and neo-formations, each of which is

divided further on into stylistic, lexical, or semantic type of creation (adding syntactic in the case of ‘phrase’ category). An authorial creation is considered to be a stylistic one, when a new form is introduced; a semantic, when an existing word receives a new meaning, and lexical, when both a form and a meaning are novel. This distribution is based on the semantic triangle, proposed by F. de Saussure.

In this work a neologism or a neo-formation is a word or a phrase which denotes an element of the objective reality in fictional world described in the trilogy, the main function of which is to denominate new locations, objects, phenomena, and creatures.

Terminological Taxonomy of Novel Formations



Bar Chart

As for nonce-formation, it is one-time word or phrase. The term presupposes high level of context-dependency and denotes the lexical innovations unlikely to repeat.

As a result of the conducted research it was found that the distribution of the authorial creations is not at all even among the basic categories. For example, there is one sole instance of neo-morpheme of fairly opaque meaning; it is the prefix *byan-* (as in ‘byanplats’, denoting a location, such as a plateau) which structurally might be the fusion of the preposition ‘by’ in the sense of ‘in proximity with’ and indefinite article ‘an’; however, this is so far just a speculation. The nonce-sentence ‘Ayama yuman’ is stylistically marked and is another

way of saying 'I'm a human' by someone who is new to English; thus the present category is also rather poor.

The category of 'new words' is the most numerous (118 nonce-words and neologisms out of 158 authorial creations). P.Pullman made use mostly of compounding, but also of borrowing, respelling, derivation, and, finally, coinage to craft novel lexical and stylistic units. As for the category of 'new phrases' it has the second largest number and comprises 38 neo-phrasemes.

In what follows one will find a brief representation of the algorithm devised for checking the component of novelty of the authorial creations. Firstly, translate the formations into the native tongue; a novel creation should not be found in any of the dictionaries. Secondly, look up the remaining list of formations in the explanatory dictionaries (e.g. OED, Merriam-Webster). Thirdly, use Google Ngram for checking; the words found in this engine are not new. Finally, to check hyphenated words or word-combinations, look for an exact match in the Google search engine surrounding a formation with double quotation marks.

To provide a vivid sketch of the fine-spun fictional world and some directions of the intricate theoretical ideas proposed in the trilogy, we will firstly address its central concept, 'Dust', which distantly could be associated with the Dark Matter introduced by modern Physics. The semantic neologism 'Dust' denotes a special kind of conscious elementary particles which tend to condense. Another way of referring to this fundamental phenomenon is the coinage 'sraf', which, as a matter of fact, is a lexical neologism; used by peculiar beings inhabiting one of the parallel worlds described in the trilogy. The semantic neologism 'Shadows' and the eponym 'Rusakov Particles' also mean the very exact idea.

In the fictional universe 'Dust' is really influential upon life in general, natural processes, and even work of objects. Thus, for example, the work of 'alethiometer', of a compass-like device which truthfully answers questions pointing at tiny polysemous images, is a way the particles chose to communicate with people [2]. The word in fact comes from Greek in which 'alethea' stands for 'truth' and 'meter' means 'measure'. Another fictional object 'the subtle knife' is used to make openings between the worlds. However, this action has a great influence upon the behaviour of dust, which proves to be even harmful. In one of the many worlds in Pullman's universe, which has

taken another path of development than our world did, ‘the wheel-pod trees’ gave fewer and fewer seeds, which are of paramount importance to the life and existence of the Mulefa (rational cattle-like creatures, who ‘have one front leg, one back leg, and two side legs, in a diamond-shaped formation and can cover great distances, by hooking claws on their front and back legs into wheels’) [2]. Another P.Pullman’s original creation ‘Æsahættr’ (which is the synonym for ‘subtle knife’) is absolutely opaque due to foreign linguistic material used for its crafting. Etymologically the formation goes back to the Norse language and literally it means ‘destroyer of the *Æsir*’, where *Æsir* was the Norse name of the ruling gods [3].

The knife ‘has its own intentions’ and everytime it is used for ‘cutting-through’, a ‘Specter’ comes into being. This is a wicked spirit which roams about freely and consumes souls exclusively of adults (children do not even see them). This new concept is developed by P.Pullman through a number of novel formations: an adult, who suffered from an attack by this creature is characterized as ‘Specter-eaten’ and children, deprived of their parent in this way become ‘Specter-orphan’; this technique is called domestication and it is used to bring unusual authorial creations home to the reader.

Moreover, the ‘Shadows’ are the subject of study of the ‘experimental theology’ (a semantic neo-phrase), which has nothing to do with the study of God, but mostly with philosophy and a science remotely related to modern physics. In this case the writer makes use of such technique as foreignization to introduce a new concept disguised under the form of the existing and rather familiar words.

In conclusion, Philip Pullman crafts a whole new vocabulary of authorial creations which set an atmosphere of mystery and estrangement. The novel formations appear mostly on the level of ‘word’; they are in the majority of cases stylistically marked, yet of transparent meaning. The most productive means of word-building is by far compounding.

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