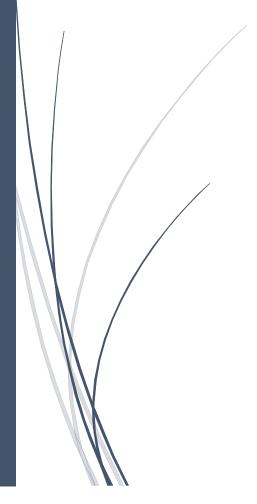# New Verbs, New Meanings, New Grammatical Properties?

An investigation of new verbs connected with social media.

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1.0 Introduction

The rise of a global network has through the past ten to twenty years contributed to the development and change in languages all around the world. Social media, through websites and phone applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tinder, has created a contemporary need for new and different words to describe this new technological universe. Such words are called neologisms. A variety of different verbs and particles develop through innovative language use as we feel sudden needs to express what we have in mind at certain moments. Among these words we can find the emergence of unique verbs that have either been derived from already existing verbs and words, or that have been specifically created for the explanation of new concepts. The aim of this paper is to show this by looking at these new verbs connected with social media, as 'case studies'. I have chosen to focus on five main verbs, or cases, that can be found in social media context, and that are widely used among native English speakers. These five verbs will be investigated based on how they have been derived from a previous use, and which specific properties they have lost and/or gained through their newly acquired meanings. In particular, each single verb will be investigated in regard to the grammatical properties of the original word they have been derived from. If the new verbs have been derived from verbs, I will ratify whether they are stative or durative, atelic or telic, punctual or dynamic, intransitive, transitive or ditransitive. The verbs will be analysed as to what extent they are similar to the words they have been derived from, and which properties that are different. To prove these points, different types of tests belonging to each of the situation classes will be used.

The aim of the assignment is to show how when a verb gains a new meaning, or is newly created (e.g. from a noun), like the verb "to text", it may also gain particular grammatical properties. These properties may come to belong to one of the aspectual classes, they combines with a certain number of argument phrases, and they have a particular subcategorization pattern.

2.0 Theoretical background

2.1 Neologism

As society develops, so do new concepts, ideas, processes and functions. The phenomenon where new words are created in some way is called "neologism". The English Professor, Peter Newmark, defines the neologism as "newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new sense" (1988, p. 140). Oxford English Dictionary had an average of 1000 new additions every quarter of the year in 2018 (Oxford University Press, 2019). However, looking for new additions in dictionaries may not fully capture the quantity of new words and word-meanings that are embedded into our language, given that many words only exist in small regions and/or struggle to be commonly accepted, or only exist for short periods of time. Regardless of our lack of specific numbers of words, we do know that they increase aligned with the constantly expanding development of society in social media, globalization, product development and such, as well as with an increased self-consciousness regarding to language. The new words may be derived from already existing words that have a meaning, and cause these existing words to acquire new senses out of context (Newmark, 1988, p. 140). Other neologies acquire completely new forms to express the concepts they describe (Newmark, 1988, p.140). Among the neologies that have been derived from already existing word structures, we have "words" and "collocations", Newmark describes these two as "old words with new senses that […] are usually translated either by a word that already exists in the TL, or by a brief functional or descriptive term" (1988, p. 142) . Among the types of new forms in Newmark's typology, only a few are relevant to this research paper. A research done at the University of Sumatera Utara in Indonesia show that the majority of new forms of neologies in social media interface are what Newmark describes as "New Coinage", "Phrasal Words", "Collocations" and "Acronyms (new and old referents) (Hardini, Setia & Mono, 2019, p. 20).

2.2 Denominal verbs

In the process of creating verbs with new meanings, a very common procedure is the denominalization of nouns into denominal verbs (Clark & Clark, 1979). This means that verbs are created by converting nouns and their meanings into activities as verbs. In this process, nouns with particular properties are derived and made into verbs so that the verb can be used as 'shortcuts' for the sake of a shorter and easier explanation and more vivid rhetorical imagery (Clark & Clark, 1979). The use of such verbs will only be understood when the language recipient is presumed to be a person with a "shared cultural knowledge of the original noun" (Clark & Clark, 1979). One particular example would be how "a text message"

becomes "a text", which again becomes "to text", meaning to send a text message via phone. In this case, the process of word-change is called "zero-derivation" or "conversion", meaning that the word in focus has not undergone any physical changes, such as adding or removing affixes, in order to attain its new meaning (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2016, p. 222). The words are still related in meaning, only in different word classes. There are also several other types of denominal verb forms in our daily language, such as the change of the word "to victimize", derived from "a victim", or "to envision" derived from "a vision". In these type of cases, the denominal verbs are created through the addition of affixations such as -ize, en-, -ate, etc (Clark & Clark, 1979).

2.3 Classifying verb situation types

When characterizing the lexical classes of a verb, there is one particular feature that separates the verbs into two categories; stative and dynamic verbs. John Saeed describes a stative verb as "[a verb where] the speaker gives no information about the internal structure of the state: it just holds for a certain time, unspecified in the above examples" (2008, p. 118). There is no activity happening in a stative verb, but rather an unchanging state of reality. This is what separates them from the dynamic verbs, which demonstrate action and events.

2.3.1 Stative and Dynamic Verbs

Stative verbs are typical verbs that cannot be used in a progressive form (Miller, 2002, p. 144). This is because the stative verbs have no internal changes or phases, and the progressive aspect carry an implication of some sort of activity and movement (Miller, 2002, p. 144). To test whether a verb is stative or not can thereby be done by inserting "I am" and the progressive aspect of the relevant verb. If the sentence seems correct, the verb is dynamic (Miller, 2002, p. 144). Consider the examples:

[a]   I am counting the sheep

[b]   *I am knowing her neighbour

Here, we can see that "know" is a static verb because of the unnatural composition of the sentence with a progressive aspect in it. The verb "counting" sounds natural in the context, which makes it a dynamic verb.

Because of the activity that happens in a dynamic verb, they may also be recognized when used as in WH-cleft construction (Miller, 2002, p. 144).

[c]   What he did was count the sheep

[d]   *What she did was know her neighbour

As we can see, the stative verb "to know" does not work well as a cleft construction, while a dynamic verb does. A side note to the aspect of stative verbs is that it may be discussed to which extent a verb is considered stative or not, by allowing imperatives for instance (Saeed, 2008 p. 121). This is usually not possible unless a verb is dynamic (Saeed, 2008, p.121). Some stative verbs work better in such tests than others, like in example [E]

[e]   What the dog did was to remain by her side

2.3.2 Telic, Atelic, Durative and Punctual Verbs

The dynamic category is large, and carry several major different traits describing the different verbs. These traits can again be divided into new categories depending on whether they are telic or atelic, and durative or punctual.

When a verb has been classified as a dynamic verb, the next step is to determine whether the verb is telic or atelic. This means that we must find out if the verb has a natural endpoint and is completed within the sentence (telic), or if it has no natural endpoint and continues on indefinitely (atelic) (Wilder, 2019; Saeed, 2008, p.121-123). Another way to differentiate these types is by asking whether we can see a change in the world after the actions are completed. Consider these examples:

[f]   Charlie stared at the great glass elevator. (Atelic)

[g]   They ripped the letter in half. (Telic)

In [f], we see no natural endpoint of the activity, and when it has been completed, the world is still in the same state as it was before the activity started. In [g], as soon as the letter has been ripped in half, the activity has ended, and the world has a whole letter less in it, meaning that it has changed somehow.

After the verb has been categorized as a telic or an atelic verb, the next stage in the process is to decide if the verb reflect a durative or punctual event. Is the activity in the verb not instantaneous and last for a period of time (durative), or does it happen right away over a very short time span (punctual) (Wilder, 2019; Saeed, 2008, p. 122). See the examples [h] and [i]:

[h]   Tina hiked up the mountain. (Durative)

[i]   Tina stopped at the top of the mountain. (Punctual)

In the durative example [h] the verb [hike] suggests that Tina used a considerable amount of time to walk from the bottom of the mountain to the top, whereas the verb "stop" in the punctual example [i] indicates Tina's instantaneous and sudden cease of movement when she has reached the top.

Based on these features, we may say that there are five verb classification types. Stative verbs, activities, semelfactives, accomplishments and achievements. Figure 1 indicates the different verb types based on the verbs' reaction to different events and situations.

Overall classification of situation types

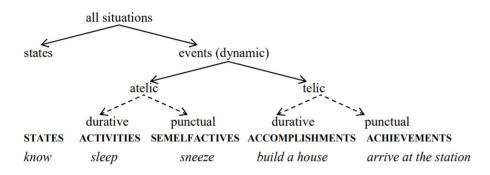*Figure 1*   (Wilder, 2019)

2.4 Change in Aspect

Even though verbs can be classified within the different situation types, this does not mean that said verbs are bound to stay in these situation types in every case they are used. In combination with other elements in a sentence, a verb may for instance move from a telic to an atelic event type or vice versa (Saeed, 2008, p.123). A verb can exist in several different situation classes depending on their aspect (Ibid). John Saeed presents some interesting examples on this in his book on semantic description (2008, p. 119):

[j]   David wrote a crime novel - finished: Durative telic (accomplishment),

[k]   David was writing a crime novel - unfinished: Durative atelic (activity).

In sentence [j] the verb 'to write' is presented as a finished durative activity, which makes it an accomplishment verb. By adding the verb 'be' and a progressive version of the main verb, like in [k], the ending of the activity is not specified, something that makes the verb atelic and turns it in to an activity verb. Other cases he mentions where the verb category changes are for instance:

[l]   Harry was singing songs. (Atelic)

[m]   Harry was singing a song. (Telic)

2.5 Transitivity and subcategorization

Transitivity and subcategorization are terms describing certain features of the verb related to the number of objects it requires to complete a sentence (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2016, p. 16). In the English language, there are three forms a verb may take. A verb may be "intransitive", meaning that the subject and the verb in a sentence do not require an element to be completed (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2016, p. 18). There is no need for a 'transition' of the action in the sentence from one to the other. An example of such a verb may be:

[n]   "The bird tweeted"

The second verb form is the "transitive" verb. In variation to the former form, this particular verb needs a direct object to complete a sentence (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2016, p. 16). Consider the sentence:

[o]   "Lucy had a key"

As we can see, this sentence would have been incomplete without the direct object. The third and last verb is the "ditransitive" verb. In some cases, transitive verbs either require or admit the use of a second, indirect object. Where the direct object most often refers to the person or thing affected by the action in the verb, the indirect object is commonly related to a person who somehow benefits from the action that the verb reflects. This is often placed in front of the direct object in the sentence (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2016, p.20). Such a case would be:

[p]   "He sent her a message".

In this case, "her" would be the indirect object and "a message" would be the direct object.

3.0 Data

The verbs that will be analysed further in the analysis section are as following:

 [1]   "To message/messenger"

[2]   "To text"

[3]   "To venmo"

[4}   "To like"

[5]   "To hate on"

In the analysis section, the examples belonging to each case will be numbered with the same number as the cases, followed by the order they have been presented in, e.g. [1.1].

4.0 Analysis

This chapter will be structured into three case-sections where I will investigate the five social media verbs mentioned in the data chapter. In each section, similar verb transformations have been organized into groups, where they will be analysed and compared. The first section will examine verbs [1]-[3], and the second section will look at verbs [4] and [5].

4.1 Section 1: Denominal verbs as achievements

This section will mainly look into the denominal verbs that have been converted from nouns. One particular trait these verbs have in common is that they are all punctual and telic.

[1]   To message/messenger: These verbs are descended from the nouns "a message" and "a messenger". The original meaning of the first noun describes a piece of information being delivered from a person to another, and the latter describes the person conveying this piece of information. In verb-form, the words means to share information from one person (or group) to another through electronic devices (Message, 2014). It is often used in context with Facebook's chat application, called "messenger", but is not used exclusively in this setting. The verb is transitive, meaning that it acquires an object to make a complete sentence, like in the example [1.1]

    [1.1]   I messaged her as she came through the door. (Intransitive)

    [1.2]   *I messaged as she came through the door. (Transitive)

    [1.3]   *I messaged her my thoughts as she came through the door. (Ditransitive)

The examples [1.2] and [1.3] show the verbs in intransitive and ditransitive modes and would be rather awkward ways of using the verb.

[2]   To venmo: This is a case of verb conversion of what may be classified as "new coinage" in Peter Newmark's neologism. "Venmo" and "Vipps" are the names of apps with similar functions in the United States and in Norway. They are applications connected to the user's bank, making it possible for a person to send or receive money from one account to another easily (Paypal.Inc, 2016; Vipps AS, n.d.). By implying that one wants to 'venmo' or 'vippse' someone, it indicates that one would like to send that person money (Paypal.Inc, 2016; Vipps, n.d.). As we can observe here, something interesting about these two cases is that they function the same way linguistically

regardless of the differences between English and Norwegian. This paper, however, will mainly focus on the English variant of the concept. When it comes down to transitivity, "venmo" may be used both in transitive and ditransitive sentences, but functions poorly in intransitive cases.

[2.1]   *I venmoed yesterday. (Intransitive)

[2.2]   I venmoed you yesterday. (Transitive)

[2.3]   I venmoed you the money yesterday. (Ditransitive)

Something to keep in mind is that venmo can in certain cases be used without objects in the sentence, but in these instances, the object is normally present in a non-verbal complementation, meaning that the objects are silent, like in the example [2.4]:

[2.4]   Wait a second, I will venmo [you] in two minutes.

Here, the object is contextually understood in the conversation, so it may be omitted without making the sentence awkward.

[3]   To text: This is a rather interesting verb, as it carries several situation classification types in its newly acquired meaning. Like the two other cases, this verb has been derived from a noun, the noun "a text". In social media context, it is rather similar to case [1] in meaning. A person 'texts' whenever he or she sends a message to someone on through a phone (Text, 2015). Like the situation classification types, this verb also carries several different forms of transitivity. Depending on how we use it, "text" may be both intransitive, transitive and ditransitive. Consider the following sentences.

[3.1]   He was texting when she walked through the front door. (Intransitive)

[3.2]   He texted her as she walked through the front door. (Transitive)

[3.3]   He texted her the address so she would enter the correct front door.
(Ditransitive)

In some cases, the intransitive verb may be mistaken for a non-verbal complementation, like what happens in [3.4]:

[3.4]   "They texted [each other] for a couple of months".

Still, in [3.1], to text may also point to an activity that is being done by one person, like "she knitted", regardless of the content of the message that is being texted.

4.1.2 Section 1 - Comparison

As previously mentioned, the verbs in this section have all been converted from nouns, which means that there are no 'older' verbs that they have descended from and that we can compare them up to in terms of verb situation categories. A reason why these specific words may have been preferred to be used as verbs could be that the concepts they represent are rather awkward and time consuming to explain differently. By converting the nouns into verbs and activities, a person may express what he or she may wish more efficiently.

By assuming that the original words have been converted to verbs for the sake of expressing activity, we also assume that the verbs in question are dynamic rather than stative. In this case, this is a correct assumption as both [1], [2] and [3] indicate physical activity. If the WH-cleft construction tests are applied, like in the following examples:

[1.4]   What he did was message his mother about being late.

[2.5]   What he did was venmo his friends for the dinner.

[3.5]   What he did was text his mother about being late.

we see that the sentences seem complete and correct, making the verbs dynamic cases.

Something else these verbs have in common is that they are achievement verbs, with both telic and punctual traits. Let us first consider what makes them telic situations. As mentioned in the theoretical section, one of the things that separate telic from atelic verbs is that the endpoint in the telic verbs marks some sort of change in the world. They can in some cases be referred to as "resultatives", meaning that they have a final point of completion, and that our attention is directed to this endpoint (Saeed, 2008, p. 122). Consider the examples:

[1.5]   Peter messaged her where to meet him.

[2.6]   Amanda venmoed her friends for dinner.

[3.6]   Jacob texted his mother his location.

In these cases, the message has been sent, the money has been received and the text message has been received. Also, the actions have been completed and have natural endpoints, something that makes them telic. Besides being telic, verbs [1], [2] and [3] are punctual, which means that they happen instantaneously and last over a very short period of time. If we take another look at the examples [1.5], [2.6] and [3.6], we may also observe that the time that goes from the activities are started until they end is virtually non-existent.

As previously mentioned, an interesting aspect about case [3] is that it separates from the other cases in that it has another situation classification type in addition to the achievement-type. As demonstrated in example [3.6], the achievement "to text" means to pass specific information along". The activity hardly consumes any time, and it is clear when the activity is finished and the state of the activity shifts into another state where Jacob's mother has received his location. In the alternative meaning, "to text" implies that someone is mainly communicating. In this context, the verb goes from being telic to atelic as the activity of communicating is not final with a clear completion of the activity. In examples:

> [3.7]   They texted each other for four years

> [3.8]   He was texting for five minutes during dinner

it is indicated that length of the activity of texting may be indefinite. When the verb contains a shift from a telic to an atelic category, the verb moves into the semelfactive category. Even though the activity can be upheld for a longer period of time, this does not indicate that the actual activity of sending each text message is durative. One particular semelfactive trait is that punctual activities can be repeated and implied as one longer continuous activity rather than multiple shorter separate activities. Such an activity could be to sneeze for ten minutes or to knock on a door for a minute, as well as to text for an hour.

4.2 Section 2: From Stative to dynamic and punctual verbs

The most particular change that happens in cases [4] and [5] is the transformation of stative (and durative) verbs into dynamic, punctual verbs. Before analysing the verbs in a deeper extent, the already existing as well as the newly acquired meanings will be explained briefly.

> [4]   To like: Descended from the verb "to like" describing an emotion or feeling towards someone or something. In its new meaning it describes a certain activity in social medias, such as Facebook and Instagram, where one publicly and permanently shows agreeability or satisfaction about a post, video, picture or such by pressing a button with a visual thumb connected to it (Like, 2019).

> [5]   To hate on: Derived from the verb "to hate", where an emotion or feeling towards someone or something is characterized. With its newly acquired properties, it describes an activity in social media, such as on Facebook and Instagram, where a person can publicly and permanently post or comment bad things about someone or something in an unpleasant way (Hate on, 2019).

One grammatical trait that has remained with both of these verbs regardless of the acquirement of new meaning, is the transitivity of the verbs. Both [4] and [5] are, like in their original meaning, transitive cases were an object is required to complete the sentence, as will be shown in the following examples.

[4.1]   *Abby liked on Facebook today. (Intransitive)

[4.2]   Abby liked Nicole's profile picture on Facebook today. (Transitive)

[4.3]   *Abby liked Nicole a profile picture on Facebook today. (Ditransitive)

[5.1]   *Nicole hated on today. (Intransitive)

[5.2]   Nicole hated on Abby's profile picture on Facebook today. (Transitive)

[5.3]   *Nicole hated on Abby a profile picture on Facebook today. (Ditransitive)

When reading these examples, we come to the conclusion that [4.2] and [5.2] are the only grammatically correct sentences because they are transitive.

4.2.2 Section 2 - Comparison

Both of the verbs that are analysed in this section have been converted from already existing verbs in daily speech. One of the greatest changes they have undergone is the change from stative to dynamic verb classification. By applying the WH cleft construction tests, we see that the original uses of the verbs do not form correct sentences, but that new forms do, like in the following examples:

[4.4]   *What Mary did was like Pete. (Stative)

[4.5]   What Mary did was like Pete's Instagram picture. (Dynamic)

[5.4]   *What Pete did was hate Mary. (Stative)

[5.5]   What Pete did was hate on Mary's Instagram picture. (Dynamic)

Since the relevant new verbs have proven to be dynamic, the following step of investigation is to determine whether they are telic or atelic. This may be one of the few areas where these two cases differentiate. This is because an object that is being 'liked' may only be 'liked' one single time. The subject 'liking' something may 'like' several different things, but not the same thing several times, given that the button indicating a 'like' only can be pushed once per person. The object being 'hated on', on the other hand, may receive negative comments several times and over a bigger time span by someone. There is in other words no limit on

how long it takes before a subject stops hating on an object. Case [4] can therefor be categorized as a telic verb, whereas case [5] acts more like an atelic verb. This may be seen in these examples:

[4.6]   Abby liked Nicole's profile picture at 2.45 pm today.

[4.7]   *Abby liked Nicole's profile picture for a year.

[5.6]   Nicole hated on Abby's profile picture at 2.45 pm today.

[5.7]   Nicole hated on Abby's profile picture for a year.

After establishing whether the cases [4] and [5] are telic or atelic, next up is the investigation of the durative and punctual situation traits of the verbs. These particular cases can be established as punctual verbs because each single activity happens immediately and very rapidly. It does not take a considerate amount of time from the activity has started before it has finished. Consider the examples:

[4.8]   *Abby liked Nicole's profile picture in 8 minutes. (Durative)

[4.9]   Abby liked Nicole's profile picture the second it was published. (Punctual)

[5.8]   *Nicole hated on Abby's profile picture in 8 minutes. (Durative)

[5.9]   Nicole hated on Abby's profile picture the second it was published. (Punctual)

Here, we can observe that the relevant verbs function poorly as single activities over longer periods of time since the actual activities in question are instantaneous. With this in mind, we may ask the question of why case [5] can be expressed as it has been in example [5.7]. Here, it has been suggested that the activity of 'hating on' a picture can last up to a whole year. Given that this case has been labelled as both punctual and atelic, it is what we call a semelfactive verb. Something that is particular for the verbs in this situation category is that they may be expressed as repeated several events lasting for a particular amount of time. The single act of hating on someone or something may be repeated an unlimited amount of times for an unlimited period of time even though it is punctual, like the second interpretation of case [3]. This explains what we see in examples [5.6] and [5.7]. Case [4] cannot be used the same way because it is an achievement verb, meaning that it expresses an instantaneous change of state leading to a new state. A picture has one more 'like' than what it had before case [4] occurred.

5.0 Conclusion

Verbs may be categorized into a variety of different situation types based on whether they are stative or dynamic, telic or atelic, or punctual or durative. In addition, subcategorization also shows the different grammatical features of a verb. Through this, verbs may be revealed to only belong with a subject and/or a complement, or acquire one or more objects to form complete grammatical English sentences. As new words are created every day, new verbs reach the surface of language and acquire their own combinations of situation types and grammatical traits. This paper has investigated how the new social media verbs "to message", "to venmo", "to text", "to like" and "to hate on" have been created and/or derived from other common words in the English language, and which properties they have gained or lost in this process.

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