

A BREXIT case study: towards a lexicogrammatical approach to neologisms  
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It is well established that the semantics of a lexical item is understood, in part at least, by the association of the item to the other lexical items used around it - 'you shall know a word by the company it keeps' (Firth, 1957:11). However new words are formed in the English language regularly and this means that, in theory, they are candidates for providing a non-historical perspective on their meaning in use. Any newly formed word is formed for a purpose and therefore it is reasonable to assume that the word will bear some meaning that is related to its context of use. The relatively new English word *Brexit* provides us with a rare opportunity to capture the lexicogrammatical patterns of this neologism. This is because it was coined in print, making it possible to track its development using methods from corpus linguistics. New words more frequently develop in spoken language, which normally does not leave any trace, therefore making it very difficult to know with any certainty how its meaning evolves. As is well known in the UK, *Brexit* is a blend of *British* + *exit*, which expresses the meaning of 'Britain exiting from the EU'. However, the word itself only entered the English language in 2012. This paper tries to map out the development of the meaning(s) of *Brexit* by analysing its use from 2012 until the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. The approach taken here combines corpus linguistics with systemic functional linguistics in an original way, showing how the patterns found contribute to the meanings expressed. The paper also considers which associated meanings changed or remained stable over the four years of this study.

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