

Contrastive Analysis of Climate-Related Neologisms Registered in German and French Wikipedia

Neologisms represent new social norms, tendencies, controversies and attitudes. They denote new or changed concepts which are constantly being negotiated between different members of the discourse community (cf. Wodak 2022 and Catalano/Waugh 2020). Neologisms help to identify new communicative patterns and narratives which illustrate different strings of discourse in everyday life. In recent years, many neologisms relating to the subject of the environment and climate have been emerging around the world mainly due to dominant discussions on climate change and the movement “Fridays for Future”. In German, for example, neologisms such as *Klimakleber*, *klimaresilient* and *globaler Streik* and in French neologisms such as *éco-anxiété*, *justice climatique* and *écocitoyen* could be observed. These neologisms occur in many domains of life, for example in politics, media and also in advertising, which means that “l’importance croissante des enjeux environnementaux dans les discours politiques, médiatiques et publicitaires” (Balnat/Gérard 2022: 22) can be identified. However, it is not only the occurrence of environment- or climate-related topics that is increasing, but also the rising polarisation of the public debate. The polarisation within public discourse is based on the fact that there are opposing positions which are represented by new or recently relevant terms such as *activistes du climat* (or *Klimaaktivisten*) and *climatosceptiques* (or *Klimaskeptiker*) (cf. Balnat/Gérard 2022: 22). Due to different identifications with one or the other side, one can also speak of an “affrontement idéologique” (Balnat/Gérard 2022: 23).¹

The explosive nature and the high complexity of the debate on climate and the environmental issues mean that many words are naturally unfamiliar to people. This is especially true with regard to neologisms. In addition, it is often not only the new word itself but also the signified concept that is initially unknown. When people then look up words, they often do so on the Internet. Wikipedia as a “free encyclopedia” (Wikipedia 2023) is particularly well suited as an object of study with regard to neologisms, since factual knowledge is given special attention there. Furthermore, this reference guide is perceived as a regular source of agreed and common knowledge on all sorts of subjects. Hence, the descriptions found here represent social agreement on controversial terms and discussions to some degree.

In this paper, German and French neologisms from the subject area of climate and environment will be examined primarily in Wikipedia, but also in the neighbouring resource Wiktionary², which is “a collaborative project to produce a free-content multilingual dictionary” (Wiktionary 2023). Since Wikipedia and Wiktionary are available in French and in German, both are equally suitable for the contrastive analysis. Thus, Wikipedia articles which are accessible in both languages (e.g. *Klimanotstand* and *État d'urgence climatique*) or Wikipedia articles about similar events and phenomena (e.g. *Letzte Generation* and *Dernière Rénovation*) will be compared. For example, we will have a closer look at other new terms specifying different thematic aspects of the discourse of climate and environment. We will mainly refer to those lexical items which can be found in the respective articles in both languages. Special emphasis will be on overlaps and differences, thematic foci, speaker’s positions and evaluative terms.

Keywords: German, French, neologisms, contrastive analysis, climate, environment, Wikipedia, discourse analysis

¹ For similar discussions in different discourses also see Baker 2005 and Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery 2013.

² Wiktionary offers the advantage that it can display the dictionary content sorted onomasiologically, so that, for example, the *Lexique en français de l’écologie* can be searched targetably.

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