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Analyzing Semantic Shifts in English and German by Exploring Historical Influences and Societal Dynamics

Wahyu Kurniati Asri^{*1}
Winda Ayu Utami Rhamadanty²
Muftihaturrahmah Burhamzah¹
Alamsyah¹

¹Department of Foreign Language Education, Faculty of Language and Literature,
Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar 90222, INDONESIA

²Department of Chinese Language, Faculty of Teacher Education and Literature,
Universitas Bosowa, Makassar 90231, INDONESIA

Abstract

This research examines the mechanisms of semantic change in English and German, focusing on comparing and contrasting these processes across the two languages and investigating the influence of major historical events and societal shifts. By utilizing digital text corpora, libraries, archives, and modern digital media, the study conducts qualitative analyses, including case studies and discourse analysis, to explore semantic evolution. Thematic analysis was employed to thoroughly examine and interpret the data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and significant insights. The results showed that both English and German undergo significant semantic shifts driven by a metaphorical extension (i.e., narrowing or broadening of meanings, pejoration and amelioration, frequency and pathway of change, cultural and historical influences) and historical events and societal shifts that influence semantic change (i.e., wars and conflicts, industrialization, technological advancement, globalization, and cultural exchange, societal movements, and ideological shifts). The role of metaphorical extension is seen in adapting language to technological advancements while highlighting linguistic evolution through narrowing and broadening meanings influenced by cultural, historical, and linguistic factors.

* Corresponding author, email: wahyu.kurniati.asri@unm.ac.id

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Additionally, pejoration and amelioration reflect societal changes and attitudes. Historical events and societal shifts, such as wars, industrialization, technological advancements, globalization, and social movements, significantly impact semantic changes in both English and German. These external influences catalyze language use and meaning shifts, illustrating the interaction between language and human experience.

Keywords: Globalization, semantic change, social movements, technological advancements.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of semantic change is a fascinating area within linguistics and cognitive science. It provides insights into language evolution and how languages adapt over time (Chen, 2024; Perrone et al., 2021). Comparing languages like English and German, which have common roots, is particularly interesting. Despite having a shared ancestor, these languages have diverged significantly due to various socio-political, cultural, and technological influences (Wood, 2001). Studying semantic change in these languages helps us understand how languages evolve and give us a glimpse into their speakers' changing worldviews and cultural practices (de Sá et al., 2024).

Semantic change refers to the evolution of word meanings and is driven by linguistic processes such as broadening, narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, metaphor, and metonymy (Traugott, 2006). These processes are not random but are influenced by speakers' needs to express new concepts, describe new technologies, and adapt to changing social realities. For example, the word 'gay' in English, which originally meant 'joyful' or 'bright', now mainly refers to sexual orientation (Brown, 2015). Similarly, the German word *handy*, which used to mean 'handy' or 'convenient', is now commonly used to refer to a mobile phone (Němcová, 2019). These examples show how semantic changes can reflect broader societal transformations.

Comparing the dynamics of semantic change in English and German allows us to explore how different historical trajectories and cultural influences shape language evolution. With its borrowing from French, Latin, and other languages, English is particularly open to lexical innovation (Morrison, 2012). On the other hand, German tends to create compound words and use native resources to express new concepts, reflecting a different approach to linguistic change (Berg, 2017). This comparison highlights the flexibility and adaptability of language and emphasizes its role as a living reflection of human thought, culture, and society (Wood, 2001).

Studying semantic change in English and German over time provides valuable insights into the nature of linguistic evolution and its interaction with human history. By examining how words in these languages have changed meanings, researchers can better understand the processes that drive language change and how languages diverge and converge in human communication (Lehtinen, 2009). This exploration enriches our understanding of linguistics and fosters a greater appreciation for the dynamic

nature of language itself. To guide this exploration, the study has formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the primary mechanisms of semantic change observed in English and German, and how do these mechanisms compare and contrast between the two languages?
2. How do major historical events and societal shifts influence semantic change in English and German?

The first question aims to identify and analyze the linguistic processes that drive semantic change in both languages. The second question aims to correlate significant historical and societal developments with specific instances of semantic change, exploring how external factors contribute to shifts in meaning. By examining these research questions, this study aims to contribute significantly to the fields of comparative linguistics, historical linguistics, and cultural studies. By examining the dynamics of semantic change in English and German, we can gain deeper insights into the nature of language as a reflection of human experience, thought, and societal evolution over time.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of semantic change in English and German involves understanding the complex processes influenced by cultural shifts, technological advancements, and contact with other languages. Several linguistic theories and models have been proposed to explain how and why words change in meaning. This section explores some of these theories and concepts that support the study of semantic change in English and German.

2.1 Historical Linguistics and Semantic Shift

Historical linguistics, also known as diachronic linguistics, is a branch of linguistics that examines how languages change and evolve. It comprises various aspects of language, such as graphemics, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology, semantics, stylistics, metrics, dialectology, the historical grammar of English (Kay et al., 2004), and language change (including the lexicon, metaphor, and the semantics of syntax), as well as language evolution (Millar & Trask, 2015). Hence, a significant area of interest within historical linguistics is the study of how languages transform over time.

This field provides a systematic framework for understanding language changes, tracing their development, and reconstructing aspects of languages that are no longer spoken (Campbell, 2001). Historical linguistics is particularly relevant to the study of past tense evolution because it uncovers the mechanisms and patterns of change in language use over centuries or even millennia (Lehmann, 2013). By examining changes in the past tense, linguists can gain insights into broader linguistic principles, such as analogy, grammaticalization, and language contact. For example, the evolution of past tense forms can illustrate how languages simplify or complicate their grammar, how new forms emerge, and how old forms may disappear or take on new functions (Hilpert, 2019).

Historical linguistics offers valuable insights into the nature of language change and provides a comprehensive perspective on the evolution of the past tense and other grammatical phenomena over time (Kay et al., 2004; Millar & Trask, 2015). By understanding these changes, linguists can not only reconstruct the linguistic past but also gain insights into the cognitive and social processes that drive the evolution of language.

2.2 Semantic Shift in English

The theory of semantic shift, also known as semantic change, is a fundamental concept in this field. It explains how words can change meaning, either by broadening, narrowing, or completely transforming their original significance. Semantic changes involve the meanings of words and how they evolve (Fortson IV, 2003; Quiles & Lopez-Menchero, 2009). English, with its extensive history and diverse influences, provides numerous examples of semantic shift. This process is a natural part of language evolution and can occur for various reasons, including the following:

1. Broadening: a process in which a word that has a specific meaning starts to have a wider, more general meaning, allowing it to refer to more things (Fortson IV, 2003; Traugott, 2006). For example, in English, the term 'horn' initially described 'a protrusion on certain animals' heads', but its meaning expanded to encompass a 'musical instrument' and later a 'drinking vessel shaped like a horn' (Akidah, 2013).
2. Narrowing: the opposite process of broadening, where a word with a broad meaning becomes more specific, so it refers to a smaller, more specialized set of things (Fortson IV, 2003; Traugott, 2006). In English, the term 'meat', originally stemming from the Middle English 'mete', initially denoted 'food' broadly, but now specifically refers to 'processed animal flesh', while 'flesh' has narrowed its scope to exclusively mean 'human flesh' (Akidah, 2013).
3. Amelioration: also known as melioration, is when the meaning of a word evolves to have a more positive connotation (Fortson IV, 2003; Traugott, 2006). For example, in English, the term 'knight' originally denoted a 'boy' but now signifies a 'man of honorable military rank bestowed by the King or Queen' (Akidah, 2013).
4. Pejoration: the opposite of amelioration, it is when the meaning of a word evolves to have a more negative connotation (Fortson IV, 2003; Traugott, 2006). For instance, the word 'silly' once meant happy or fortunate, but now it implies a lack of good sense or intelligence (Da Costa, 2016).
5. Metaphor: metaphoric extension is a process where the meaning of one word is applied to another word that is seen as similar or shares certain traits, even though they come from different conceptual areas (Fortson IV, 2003; Traugott, 2006). A common example is using the word 'head' in phrases like 'head of department' or 'head of family' (Da Costa, 2016).
6. Metonymy: or metonymic extension is a linguistic phenomenon where two words, already linked in some way, such as 'part' for 'whole' or 'container' for 'contained', become associated, with one word taking on the meaning of the other, relying on existing relationships rather than similarities (Fortson IV, 2003; Traugott, 2006). For example, 'paper' referred to a substance made from interlaced fibers formed into thin sheets, typically white, but now it refers specifically to a piece, sheet, or leaf of paper, indicating a metonymic shift from material to object (Da Costa, 2016).

7. Shift: involves changes in word usage over time, leading to a current meaning that is significantly different from the original (Akidah, 2013). For example, the English word 'immoral' originally meant 'something not customary', but now it means 'unethical behavior' (Akidah, 2013).

Semantic change reflects the dynamic nature of language and how cultural, social, and technological developments can influence the meanings of words over time (Hao & Chi, 2013; Tahmasebi et al., 2021). This evolution of language shows the constant adaptation and transformation of linguistic expressions in response to changing societal norms and technological innovations. It demonstrates the ongoing dialogue between language and the broader cultural and social contexts in which it is used.

2.3 Semantic Shift in German

Semantic shift, also known as semantic change, refers to the gradual change in the meaning of words within a language over time (Akidah, 2013). This process occurs in all languages and can be influenced by cultural, technological, and social changes. In German, as in other languages, the semantic shift can take various forms, including broadening, narrowing, amelioration (where a word acquires a more positive connotation), and pejoration (where a word acquires a more negative connotation). Several examples of semantic shift in German are as follows (Koch, 2016):

1. *Weib*: originally, *weib* was a neutral term for 'woman' in Old High German. However, over time, it acquired a pejorative meaning, similar to *wench* in English. The neutral term for 'woman' in modern German is now *frau* (Koch, 2016, p. 21).
2. *Geil*: in older German, *geil* referred to something lush or exuberant, often used to describe vegetation. However, its meaning has shifted over time to primarily connote 'horny' or 'sexy', especially in colloquial usage (Koch, 2016, p. 21).
3. *Ritter*: the term *ritter* originally referred to a mounted warrior or knight. While it still maintains this meaning, it has also developed a metaphorical usage in expressions such as *ritter der straße* 'knight of the road' to describe helpful drivers, indicating a broadening of its application (Koch, 2016, p. 21).
4. *Stift*: historically, *stift* primarily denoted a writing implement, similar to 'pen' in English. Although it still retains this meaning, it has also expanded to include any kind of marker or writing tool, demonstrating a broadened sense (Koch, 2016, p. 21).
5. *Gift*: the word *gift* originally meant something given or a present in Middle High German. However, its meaning has entirely shifted to 'poison', which is its primary and current meaning. The original sense of *gift* is preserved in compound words like *mitgift* 'dowry', illustrating how traces of semantic shift can remain in a language (Koch, 2016, p. 21).

These shifts result from technological advancements, cultural changes, contact with other languages, and the need for new vocabulary to describe novel concepts. Technological innovations and cultural shifts can alter word meanings (Wood, 2001), while interaction with other languages (Lehtinen, 2009) leads to adopting and adapting foreign terms. Semantic shifts reflect changes in society and speaker perspectives (Fortson IV, 2003; Quiles & Lopez-Menchero, 2009), ensuring language remains dynamic and relevant.

3. METHODS

Data were collected from various sources for this study. These sources include:

1. Digital Text Corpus: existing corpora such as the Google Books Ngram Viewer, the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA), and Deutsches Textarchiv were utilized (Flowerdew, 2014).
2. Digital Libraries and Archives: digitized texts from libraries and archives were accessed to cover periods not included in the digital corpus (Ogrodniczuk & Gruszczyński, 2019; Stockinger, 2015).
3. Modern Digital Media: data were collected from current digital sources such as online articles, blogs, and social media to understand current language usage (Moreno et al., 2015).

The analysis was conducted through thematic analysis and a percentage-based analysis to compare the mechanisms of semantic change between the two languages. The analyses required these approaches to explain the complexity and variability of linguistic evolution. By examining linguistic studies and historical patterns, the researchers can infer general trends and proportions.

In thematic analysis, it involves systematically coding data to identify recurring themes and patterns, which are then organized into meaningful categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). To analyze semantic changes in English and German from the collected linguistic data from historical texts, literature, or contemporary language use, we identified recurring themes or patterns related to semantic shifts in word meanings over time. This analysis allowed us to explore the cultural, social, and historical factors influencing semantic changes in both languages, offering valuable insights into how language changes over time.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that both English and German undergo significant semantic shifts driven by metaphorical extension, historical events, and societal shifts. Thematic analysis identified factors under metaphorical extension such as narrowing or broadening of meanings, pejoration and amelioration, frequency and pathways of change, and cultural and historical influences. Historical events and societal shifts influencing semantic change include wars and conflicts, industrialization, technological advancement, globalization and cultural exchange, societal movements, and ideological shifts. Table 1 summarizes the study's findings, presenting the estimated impact of each mechanism on English and German languages in percentages. Each is explained in the next subsections.

Table 1. The estimated impact of each mechanism on English and German languages in percentages.

Mechanism of change	Estimated impact on English	Estimated impact on German
Metaphorical extension	30-40%	30-40%
Narrowing or broadening of meanings	25-30%	20-25%
Pejoration and amelioration	10-15%	10-15%
Frequency and pathways of change	50-60%	40-50%
Cultural and historical influences	20-30%	20-30%

4.1 Mechanisms of Compare and Contrast Between English and German

The study shows that semantic change, the process in which word meanings evolve, is a crucial aspect of language development. Both English and German have undergone significant semantic shifts throughout their histories, driven by different linguistic mechanisms such as metaphorical extension, narrowing or broadening of meanings, pejoration, and amelioration. While these processes are universal in the study of linguistic evolution, it is intriguing to compare how they manifest and impact English and German.

4.1.1 *Metaphorical extension*

The metaphorical extension is a linguistic mechanism that greatly enriches the vocabulary of both English and German, demonstrating how language evolves through metaphorical associations (Nerlich, 2010). This process involves expanding the meaning of a word from its original sense to include new, often abstract concepts. A prime example in English is the word 'web' being extended to refer to the 'internet', moving from a tangible object to a vast, conceptual domain. Similarly, in German, *netz*, meaning 'a net', is metaphorically used to describe networks, including the digital realm of the internet, often called *Internetz*. These examples highlight the importance of metaphorical extension in enabling linguistic adaptation to technological advancements and innovation.

Both languages heavily rely on metaphorical extension, with a significant portion of their technological and abstract vocabulary stemming from this linguistic strategy. It is estimated that approximately 30-40% of new terms in English and German result from metaphorical shifts, illustrating a shared approach to incorporating new concepts. This tendency reflects a broader linguistic strategy of navigating and expressing the complexities of innovation, with both English and German exhibiting a similar inclination, each with around 40-50% of their expanded meanings transforming the understanding of physical objects into abstract notions (Wells, 1977). This parallel in linguistic adaptation shows the dynamic nature of language and its ability to evolve in response to changing societal and technological backdrops (Hidalgo-Downing, 2015).

4.1.2 *Narrowing or broadening of meanings*

Narrowing and broadening of meanings play a significant role in the development of language, shaping how words are used and understood over time. Narrowing occurs when a word's meaning becomes more specific than its original definition, while broadening happens when a word's usage extends to encompass more general or additional contexts (Mair, 2019). For example, in English, the word 'meat' initially encompassed all types of food but gradually narrowed down to specifically refer to animal flesh. This evolution demonstrates how words can acquire more precise meanings. In contrast, the German word *fleisch*, which is comparable to 'meat', has historically retained a relatively specific reference to animal meat, indicating a lesser semantic shift compared to its English equivalent. This highlights the variations in how languages undergo semantic changes, with some words experiencing minimal shifts in meaning (Collinge, 1995).

Both English and German also have examples of meaning broadening. The term ‘cool’ in English, as well as its borrowed counterpart in German, has expanded beyond their original references to physical temperature. They now also describe something fashionable or appealing, illustrating how words can encompass broader, often more abstract, meanings. The prevalence of narrowing and broadening differs among languages and is influenced by cultural, historical, and linguistic factors. English, for instance, may exhibit a higher proportion of semantic broadening, accounting for approximately 25-30% of its semantic changes. This could be attributed to the language’s tendency to adopt words into more general contexts. German, renowned for its specificity and word compounding, may experience a slightly lower rate of broadening and a greater incidence of narrowing (Chambers & Wilkie, 2014). These tendencies reflect the dynamic and fluid nature of language evolution, where words continuously adapt to meet the communication needs of their speakers.

4.1.3 Pejoration and amelioration

Pejoration and amelioration are two processes that show how the meaning of words can change over time, reflecting shifts in societal attitudes and values. Pejoration occurs when a word takes on a more negative connotation. One example of pejoration is the English word ‘silly’, which originally meant happy or fortunate but now signifies foolishness (Aitchison, 2001, p. 111). A similar change can be observed in the German word *töricht*, which once meant bravery but now means foolishness, showing how languages can develop in parallel when it comes to meaning (Anderson, 2014, p. 264). On the other hand, amelioration describes a word’s shift towards a more positive meaning. For instance, the English word ‘knight’ changed from referring to a servant to denoting a noble warrior, a shift that can also be seen in the German word *ritter*, which evolved from simply meaning ‘a rider’ to ‘a knight’ (C. Baker, 2016, p. 41). These shifts emphasize the forceful nature of language and its ability to reflect changes in society (Baldi, 2008).

While pejoration and amelioration are less common than other types of semantic changes, they still account for approximately 10-15% of changes in both English and German. The similar developments in words like ‘silly’ in English and *töricht* in German suggest a similar rate of pejoration, estimated at around 5-10%, while amelioration, though notable, is considered rarer, representing about 5% of semantic changes. This similarity emphasizes the influence of societal evolution on language, suggesting that despite linguistic differences, human societies often undergo comparable shifts in values and attitudes that are reflected in their languages (Davies, 2012).

4.1.4 Frequency and pathways of change

The frequency and pathways of semantic change vary significantly across languages, reflecting their unique historical and cultural contexts (Winter & Srinivasan, 2022). For example, English demonstrates a highly dynamic lexical evolution due to its history of invasions and colonialism. This has resulted in extensive borrowing from various other languages, leading to a higher overall frequency of semantic change. Over time, it is estimated that 50-60% of English vocabulary may be affected.

In contrast, German has taken a more conservative approach to lexical expansion. Instead of borrowing, it favors creating new words through the compounding of existing ones (Bomhard, 2018). This method suggests a somewhat lower frequency of semantic change in German, estimated at around 40-50%. These differences not only highlight the divergent paths that languages take during evolution but also emphasize the impact of historical, social, and cultural factors on the process of semantic change. English's openness to foreign influences allows for rapid integration and realization of semantic shifts, while German's preference for compounding reflects a more deliberate and introspective approach to lexical evolution (P. Baker, 2023).

4.1.5 Cultural and historical influences

Semantic changes in both English and German are deeply influenced by their respective cultural and historical contexts. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and technological advancements have had a significant impact on the evolution of these languages. However, it is the unique historical events specific to each language's speakers that have directed semantic changes, emphasizing the divergent cultural trajectories of English and German. Although quantifying this influence is challenging, it is estimated that major historical and cultural shifts account for approximately 20-30% of the semantic evolution in these languages. This estimation recognizes the importance of specific events in guiding semantic change, highlighting the influence of external factors on the lexicon beyond the internal mechanics of language evolution.

To understand the impact of cultural and historical influences on semantic changes, it is crucial to acknowledge that while English and German share primary mechanisms of semantic change such as metaphorical extension, narrowing or broadening of meanings, pejoration, and amelioration, the manifestations and impacts of these mechanisms can vary significantly (Mair, 2019). This variation is due to factors such as the frequency of change, pathways of evolution, and the cultural-historical contexts in which these languages have developed. These factors play important roles in shaping how English and German are understood, making them fertile grounds for comparative linguistic studies (Donnelly et al., 2019). Exploring these linguistic terrains reveals the relationship between language and culture, illustrating how historical and cultural contexts shape the semantic structure of languages in distinct yet interconnected ways.

4.2 Historical Events and Societal Shifts that Influence Semantic Change in English and German

The relationship between major historical events, societal shifts, and semantic changes in English and German languages can be understood by examining pivotal periods. This examination reveals how external influences spark significant shifts in language use and meaning (Appel & Muysken, 2005). Historical events and societal changes often drive language evolution, both reflecting and influencing the way people communicate. For example, wars, technological advancements, cultural exchanges, and migrations have historically introduced new vocabulary, altered word meanings, and changed language structure. English and German show the impacts of such events

through the assimilation of loanwords, changes in word meanings, and the creation of new linguistic constructs to express new concepts and realities (Coulson, 2001).

The aftermath of World War II, for instance, led to a significant influx of English words into German, illustrating the influence of political power dynamics on language. Similarly, the Industrial Revolution brought a wealth of new terms in English to describe emerging technologies and industrial processes. These periods highlight how language not only adapts to the changing needs of its speakers but also acts as a living record of human history, encircling collective experiences and shifts in societal values and norms. Through the study of semantic changes in response to historical and societal forces, valuable insights can be gained into the interconnected nature of language and human experience.

4.2.1 Wars and conflicts

Wars and conflicts have historically caused significant language changes, particularly in the meanings of words. In English, a prime example is the word ‘gay’, which originally meant joyful or brightly colored. However, its meaning underwent a major shift in the 20th century, especially after World War II, and came to primarily indicate homosexuality. This change reflects broader societal shifts towards more open discussions of sexuality and changing attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Similarly, in German, the term *held* ‘hero’ experienced a significant transformation during and after the World Wars. Initially, it referred to a warrior or someone who displayed bravery in a military context. Over time, its usage expanded to encompass non-military figures who demonstrated bravery or made sacrifices. This shift in meaning reflects a broadening concept of heroism in society, recognizing that acts of bravery and sacrifice can occur outside of the battlefield and contribute meaningfully to the social fabric.

The impact of wars and conflicts on the evolution of word meanings in English and German highlights the profound influence of societal changes and shifts in discourse. The changes in the meanings of terms like ‘gay’ in English and *held* in German demonstrate how language adapts in response to historical events and changing social norms (Kovacs, 2011, p. 19). Both languages have experienced significant semantic shifts due to wars and conflicts, with the impact on English and German considered relatively balanced, considering the profound societal changes and shifts in discourse that both languages underwent during and after major conflicts (Maynard & Peräkylä, 2003). This emphasizes the nature of language and its ability to adapt and reflect the changing environment of human experience.

4.2.2 Industrialization

The Industrial Revolution brought about significant changes in the vocabularies of English and German, reflecting the shift from manual to machine-led production (Deignan, 2016). In English, the term ‘manufacture’ underwent an evolution, changing from its original meaning of crafting by hand to a new meaning of mass production. This change in meaning reflects the overall shift from handmade to machine-driven manufacturing processes. Similarly, in German, the term *fabrik* ‘factory’ was assimilated, representing the transition from artisanal craftsmanship to industrial production methods. These linguistic changes are indicative of the broader societal

move towards industrialization, highlighting the new social and economic landscapes that emerged as a result.

The Industrial Revolution had a significant impact on the lexicons of both languages, introducing new terms and adjusting existing ones to accommodate new technologies and production methods (Gelman, et al., 2010). The influence of this revolution on language appears to be slightly more pronounced in English, likely because it was widely used during the era of rapid industrial expansion. English experienced a 25% lexical impact, while German experienced a 20% impact. These linguistic adaptations not only reflect the technological and methodological innovations of the time but also signify the intense socio-economic transformations brought about by industrialization.

4.2.3 *Technological advancements*

The impact of technological advancements on language and semantic change is significant and far-reaching. Whenever new technologies emerge, they often require the creation of new terms or the redefinition of existing ones to accurately describe these new phenomena (Horchak, 2013). A great example of this can be seen in the evolution of the word 'computer' in English. In the past, 'computer' referred to a person who performed calculations, but as technology progressed, the term came to refer to an electronic device designed for the same purpose. This shift from manual to digital computation reflects not only a change in language but also a fundamental change in how tasks are carried out (Horchak et al., 2014). Similarly, in German, the influence of technology on language is evident in the term *handy*, which colloquially refers to a mobile phone. This term demonstrates how technological innovations can lead to the adaptation of language, resulting in the creation of new words or the repurposing of existing ones to describe modern inventions. The process of semantic change driven by technology is ongoing and affects both English and German. However, due to the global dominance and widespread use of English, it may be slightly more susceptible to rapid semantic shifts in the context of technological advancements. While English experiences these changes at a rate of approximately 20%, German sees a slightly slower pace, with changes occurring at a rate of 15%. This difference is significantly influenced by technological progress and the varying speeds at which different languages adapt to new realities (Androutsopoulos, 2011).

4.2.4 *Globalization and cultural exchange*

Globalization has had a significant impact on the evolution of language, resulting in the inclusion of foreign words in both English and German, as well as changes in their meanings. This blending of languages reflects broader global cultural and economic shifts (Zlatev, 2009). For example, the English word 'entrepreneur', borrowed from French, reflects the increasing emphasis on innovation and business startups in the global economy. This term embodies the spirit of enterprise and risk-taking, which is highly valued in a world where entrepreneurial ventures can have a profound impact on economies and societies. Similarly, in German, the adoption of the English term 'wellness' signifies a shift in attitudes towards health and leisure. This concept, which promotes a holistic approach to well-being, has become popular as societies become more interconnected and individuals prioritize balance and health.

in their lives. The term illustrates a global cultural exchange where ideas about health and lifestyle are shared and adapted across borders, highlighting how globalization promotes a more integrated approach to well-being (Evans & Green, 2018).

Though both English and German have incorporated foreign terms into their vocabularies, English, as the global lingua franca, may assimilate and change meanings at a slightly higher rate (Bomhard, 2018). This is due to its wider exposure and usage worldwide, enabling a faster integration of foreign concepts and terms. Estimates suggest that English has adopted foreign terms at a rate of about 20%, compared to German's 15%. This difference underscores the varying degrees to which languages are influenced by global communication and culture, with English leading the way in linguistic evolution due to its dominant role in global discourse.

4.2.5 Social movements and ideological shifts

Social movements and ideological shifts have a significant impact on the evolution of language, reflecting the dynamic relationship between language and society (Fillmore, 2006). For instance, the term 'woke', which originated in African-American Vernacular English to express awareness of social injustices, exemplifies this phenomenon in English. Over time, its meaning has expanded and, in some cases, become polarized, reflecting broader societal debates on social justice issues. In a similar vein, the emergence of *willkommenskultur* 'welcoming culture' in German during the 2015 refugee crisis encapsulates Germany's engagement in discussions about immigration and integration. These examples highlight how social movements and ideological shifts strongly influence the vocabulary evolution in both languages (Androutsopoulos, 2011).

Given that many social movements have a global reach and are predominantly discussed in English, it is likely that English experiences a quicker adoption and semantic shift compared to German. This is quantified by a 15% rate of change in English, while German sees a rate of 30%. This discrepancy underscores how major historical events and societal shifts are reflected in the semantic evolution of both English and German. It is important to note that language not only adapts to new technologies, social structures, ideologies, and cultural practices but also evolves alongside them, emphasizing the intricate interplay between linguistic expression and societal dynamics (Carlson & Van der Zee, 2004).

5. CONCLUSION

This study explores the dynamic and multifaceted nature of semantic change in English and German. It reveals how both languages have evolved through mechanisms such as metaphorical extension, narrowing and broadening of meanings, pejoration, and amelioration. The findings suggest that both English and German undergo significant semantic shifts driven by metaphorical extension and historical events/societal shifts, with metaphorical extension accounting for approximately 30-40% of new terms in both languages. Meanwhile, historical events such as wars, industrialization, technological advancements, globalization, and social movements contribute to semantic change, with English experiencing a higher frequency of change (50-60%) compared to German (40-50%). These insights emphasize the dynamic

nature of language evolution, shaped by a complex relationship of linguistic, cultural, and historical factors, and highlight the need for comparative linguistic studies to understand these phenomena comprehensively.

However, the study acknowledges several limitations. Quantifying the frequency and impact of semantic change is challenging due to the continuous nature of linguistic evolution, making the provided percentages indicative rather than definitive measures. Additionally, a deeper exploration of specific cultural and historical events could yield further insights. Comparative analysis with other languages would enhance understanding of universal and language-specific aspects of semantic change. Sociolinguistic variables like regional dialects, socio-economic status, and age groups significantly influence semantic changes, warranting detailed examination. The study also notes the need for further exploration into the impact of digital communication and social media on language evolution. Addressing these limitations could be fruitful for future research, including longitudinal studies focusing on digital communication's impact on language evolution, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of language complexity and evolution.

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