



Bielova M. O.,

PhD in Philology,

Associate Professor at the Department of English Philology

H.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1306-9395>

FORM-BASED CREATIVITY OF NEOLOGISMS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CHICK LIT

Summary. This article explores form-based linguistic creativity manifested in neologisms found in English language chick lit. The study focuses on lexical innovations that arise from both conventional and unconventional uses of English word-formation patterns. The data comprises a self-compiled corpus of 35 chick lit novels in which neologisms play a crucial socio-pragmatic role, contributing to identity construction, social positioning, social commentary/critique, subverting social hierarchies, politeness and mitigation. The analysis adopts a form-based creativity framework, which views creativity as a cline, conceptualising neologisms as outcomes of interaction between rule-governed morphology and deliberate deviation from established patterns. The study examines key morphological processes involved in creative word formation, including affixation, compounding, blending, conversion, and clipping. Particular attention is given to how familiar morphological schemas are exploited, modified, or subverted to achieve foregrounding and narrative effect. Building on this analysis, the article refines the existing continuum of form-based creativity by introducing additional subtypes. These include F(ixed)-creativity, encompassing pattern-adhering, pattern-bending, and pattern-appropriation innovation; E(mergent)-creativity, involving instances of pattern-creation; X-creativity marked by unpredictability and idiosyncrasy. Such mechanisms reveal a high degree of form-based inventiveness within the genre. The findings demonstrate that neologisms in English language chick lit are not merely playful linguistic embellishments but systematic tools of creative expression rooted in morphological competence and genre conventions. The article concludes by outlining prospects for further research into meaning-based creativity and its correlation with formal innovation in contemporary English fiction.

Key words: linguistic creativity, form-based creativity, neologism, morphological conventions, English language chick lit.

Introduction. Creativity permeates all aspects of human life and manifests itself through numerous tools, one of the most powerful being language. Its importance is undeniable: linguistic creativity plays a crucial role in constructing identity, offering cultural commentary, and expressing emotions. Yet, despite its prominence and ubiquity, mainstream linguistics has tended to overlook creativity in language, often citing the phenomenon's inherent elusiveness as the reason for its marginalisation.

This study sets out to examine lexical creativity – understood as the inventive coinage of new lexical items (neologisms) – in English language chick lit, a genre characterised by its emphasis on social observation, self-presentation, and a light, playful tone [1].

Lexical creativity is inherently dual in nature: it manifests itself through formal mechanisms of word formation as well as cognitive–semantic considerations that guide the selection of one word form over another [2]. We should therefore speak of *form-based* and *meaning-based creativity*, reflecting these two dimensions of neological innovation.

This article focuses exclusively on form-based creativity of neologisms in English language chick lit.

There is a consensus [3; 4] that something creative is novel and appropriate to the task at hand, i.e. makes sense and is useful for a particular context. The newness of neologisms is self-evident by definition: they are lexical items that are newly coined or acquire new meanings in specific contexts. In linguistic terms, usefulness refers to the semantic, pragmatic, or stylistic function the neologism serves. It may address a lexical gap, enhance expressiveness, align with speaker intention, or meet genre expectations. A neologism that is original but opaque, infelicitous, or out of place in its context may be inventive, but not appropriately creative. In the specific case of English language chick lit, usefulness must be understood genre-rationally. As will be demonstrated in this study, neologisms in chick lit are rarely coined to denote new concepts; instead, they function as facilitative devices helping to express ironic tone, character voice, social identity, emotional nuance, or cultural commentary. Their usefulness lies not in long-term integration into the broader lexicon, but in their immediate rhetorical and expressive adequacy.

Scholarly approaches to linguistic creativity reflect at least three distinct perspectives.

First, creativity is seen as a result of intentional manipulation of linguistic structures by speakers, consciously designed to innovate or play with language – a process that relies on the hearer's ability to recognise such intentionality and distinguish it from error [5, p. 290]. Second, some forms of creativity are viewed as emerging without speaker awareness or deliberate intent, as in cases of grammaticalisation, where language change proceeds gradually and automatically over time [6, pp. 2–3]. A well-known example is the contraction *let's*, which originated from the phrase *let us* – originally a request or permission (*Let us go*) – but has since grammaticalised into an imperative marker used to propose a joint action (*Let's go!*), with the sense of permission largely lost in everyday usage. Third, in generative linguistics, creativity refers to the innate human capacity to produce an infinite number of expressions from a finite set of linguistic resources, regardless of social or communicative context [7, pp. 7–8]. This Chomskyan concept of creativity closely aligns with the notion of linguistic productiv-

ity – the unremarkable, rule-governed replicability of morphological patterns or schemata to generate new forms within a language system [8, p. 203]. From this perspective, creativity is not viewed as unusual or remarkable, but rather as a normal, inherent aspect of linguistic competence lacking the sense of inventiveness or, as M. Koliopoulou and J. Walker [9] put it, noteworthiness.

In light of these differing perspectives, there is now a broad consensus that linguistic creativity is best understood as a cline [3] or a continuum [4]: it is not a yes-no phenomenon but rather a matter of degree. A. Bergs [5], relying upon G. Sampson [10, p. 19] and T. Hoffman [11, p. 262], distinguishes F(ixed)-creativity (actions that produce items from a fixed and known range of resources) matching the Chomskyan perspective of the generation of new content forms from a “fixed” range of possibilities and E(xtended)-creativity (actions that produce examples that enlarge our understanding of the range of possible products of the activity). Between these two end points of the cline lie numerous gradient cases that blur the boundaries between routine production and innovative expansion.

M. Norde and G. Trousdale [12] further refined the concept of F-creativity by introducing a distinction between two subtypes: F1-creativity, where coinages are fully sanctioned by an existing morphological schema, and F2-creativity, where forms are only partially sanctioned – stretching or relaxing certain constraints of the schema. This brief overview reveals a degree of conceptual ambiguity as M. Norde and Trousdale’s [12] F2 cases occupy a transitional position on the F–E cline, overlapping with what A. Bergs [5] conceptualises as the E-creativity.

Building on the analysis of creative neologisms in the self-compiled corpus of English language chick lit, this study proposes a more fine-grained account of F-creativity as encompassing several distinct but related subtypes, all of which operate through modifications of established morphological patterns.

These include:

- *pattern-adhering creativity*, where neologisms exhibit full compliance with existing word-formation rules and thus approach the zero-point of creativity, while achieving novelty through the unexpected or genre-salient selection of lexical bases;
- *pattern-bending creativity*, where rules are stretched through the violation of internal or external morphological constraints;
- *pattern-appropriation*, whereby an existing schematic construction or fixed template is retained but one of its elements is substituted with a contextually salient novel component.

Despite their differences, all three types remain anchored in recognisable patterns and are therefore subsumed under F-creativity.

In contrast, the dataset also reveals instances of *pattern-creation*, where entirely new morphological schemas emerge. These formations cannot be reduced to modifications of existing patterns and thus occupy a distinct position on the cline of form-based creativity. In line with, but also extending previous terminology [5; 10; 11], I will use the term E(mergent)-creativity to describe cases that involve the creation of new structural possibilities, rather than the manipulation or modification of established patterns.

Further theorising on the nature of form-based creativity, M. Koliopoulou and J. Walker [9] proposed broadening the traditional F-creativity/E-creativity distinction by introducing the concept of X-creativity where X alludes to both E(X)travagance and the notion of the unknown or unpredictable origins of individual linguistic innovations. X-creativity highlights the challenge of explaining how unique, potentially idiosyncratic innovations –

originating at the level of individual speaker behaviour – may evolve into socially shared and productive forms.

Hence, following M. Koliopoulou and J. Walker’s [9] proposal of X-creativity as well as my own refinements on the types of F- and E-creativity, I propose to conceptualise the form-based creativity cline as extending across three interconnected zones: F–E–X creativity, where:

- 1) F-creativity encompasses pattern-adhering, pattern-bending, and pattern-appropriation innovation;
- 2) E-creativity involves instances of pattern-creation;
- 3) X-creativity is a domain marked by unpredictability and idiosyncrasy. This last type of creativity does not imply greater formal innovation per se but rather signals an epistemological rupture: it points to lexical formations that resist classification, lack reproducibility, and exhibit no clear derivational path.

The creativity cline is illustrated in Figure 1.

The aim of this article is to distinguish different types of form-based creativity of neologisms in a self-compiled corpus of 35 English language chick lit novels. The object of the investigation is creative neologisms in English language chick lit, the subject – how different morphological processes give rise to distinct types of form-based linguistic creativity.

Results and Discussion. This section identifies and discusses how neologisms formed through affixation, compounding, blending, conversion, and clipping in English language chick lit exhibit different types of form-based creativity along the F–E–X cline.

F-creativity

Pattern-adhering creativity

As evidenced in the introduction, pattern-adhering creativity encompasses cases of full compliance with established morphological rules, where familiar patterns are applied without violation. As such, it occupies a position closest to the zero-point of creativity on the F–E–X cline. This type of form-based creativity is attested across major morphological processes, including affixation, compounding, and conversion, and is pervasive within the system of lexical innovation in English language chick lit.

The following example demonstrates a case of pattern-adhering creativity in affixations:

- “*Ass-Tastic! Four Butt Blasters to Get Your Rear in Gear!*” [13].

This formation adheres strictly to a well-established evaluative template in English, whereby the libfix *-tastic* is attached to a noun to create adjectives (e.g., *rocktastic* [14]). The word *ass-tastic* innovates not through structural deviation but by inserting a colloquial, body-related base (*ass*) into a familiar affixational pattern, producing a humorous and attention-grabbing term that aligns tonally with the hyperbolic and body-conscious discourse typical of chick lit. This illustrates how neologisms can achieve expressive novelty and genre-specific resonance while remaining entirely within the bounds of morphological convention.

Among compounds, only a small subset exhibits F-creativity, adhering to established compounding templates. These include primarily lexicalised syntactic structures, which are incorporated into the lexicon through frequency and idiomaticity. The effect can be seen in the following passage:

- (2) “*Suze, do that **bendy-back** pose where you look over your shoulder,” I say, and then hurry over to a photographer with dark hair and a denim jacket who’s leaning on the barrier, yawning. Yawning!* [15].

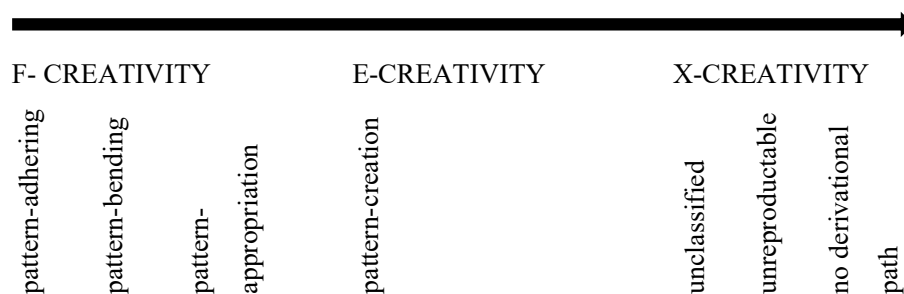


Figure 1. The form-based creativity cline

The compound *bendy-back* offers a rare but instructive example of F-creative compounding in my dataset, conforming to what L. Bauer [16, pp. 202-213] refers to as lexical uses of syntactic groups. Originally, a transparent syntactic phrase (*bendy back*), the term has been morphologically fixed into a compound noun functioning as a premodifier to *pose*, denoting a stylised, culturally recognisable physical posture.

Yet another similar example is *short-shorts*, formed by lexicalising a transparent adjective–noun phrase. In the following excerpt, it functions as a stand-alone noun compound, denoting an ultra-short style of garment:

(3) *I forced myself to look across, with an attempt at smoldering-ness. The cute guy was, however, now making out with a stunning iBabe in short-shorts and off-the shoulder sweater. 'OhMy-God, that's disgusting – she's an embryo,' said Jude. 'Call me old-fashioned, but I did read in Glamour that one's shorts should always be longer than one's vagina,' murmured Talitha* [17].

Reduplicative compounds are particularly common among English language chick lit neologisms that exhibit pattern-adhering form-based F-creativity. I will now give several examples:

(4) *The baby suddenly kicks me hard inside and I wince. Everything's so ... achey-painy. Me. Luke. The whole horrible situation* [18].

(5) *'Because what? I peer at her, and Leila suddenly swivels on her clippy-cloppy heel to Jake* [19].

As A. Mattiello [20, p. 141] states, the mechanisms of reduplication in English are not rule-governed in a way that allows for their full inclusion within the grammar of the language, although several regularities can be observed in their output. The neologisms *achy-painy* and *clippy-cloppy* provide illustrative examples of such patterned creativity. The former follows an established model of reduplicative formation that combines two near-synonymous, affectively marked adjectives – comparable to formations like *teensy-weensy* [14] – which are typically restricted to baby talk or informal registers. In this respect, *achy-painy* can be classified as an instance of F-creative pattern-adhering morphology, conforming to a recognisable template. The latter example, *clippy-cloppy*, represents another case of this type of creativity. It builds on the established echoic compound *clip-clop*, a reduplication imitating the rhythmic sound of footsteps (typically hooves), by adding child-like phonological embellishments (-y suffixation) to both elements.

Conversion is also productive in generating pattern-adhering F-creativity among English language chick lit neologisms. One illustrative example is the conversion of the noun *sheet* into a verb in:

(6) *"If I can get in to speak to him, it'll be fine. But I know I'll be fobbed off. They have no time for me any more." I sigh and reach for the car door. It's totally sheeting it down, but I can't sit here all night* [21].

While *to sheet* in (6) may appear unconventional at first glance, it emerges within an identifiable pattern of metaphorical noun-to-verb conversions that describe atmospheric or meteorological phenomena. Other attested examples in this schema include *to blanket* and *to curtain* [14], both of which metaphorically describe how weather phenomena like fog, snow, or rain can envelop or obscure a surface or scene. These verbs are themselves derived from nouns denoting broad, concealing surfaces, and their verbal uses evoke visual or tactile metaphors of coverage, continuity, or obstruction.

In this light, *to sheet* is not structurally or semantically isolated. Like *blanket* and *curtain*, it denotes a broad, flat expanse. In the context of heavy rain, *sheeting [down]* visually frames the rainfall as falling in uninterrupted, thick sheets, presenting an image of uniformity and force. The neologism thus maintains the morphological mechanism of conversion and preserves the semantic core of meteorological coverage.

One of the recurrent patterns of lexical creativity in English language chick lit is the conversion of interjections into verbs. Many coinages of this type function as delocutive verbs, that is, verbs morphologically derived from an expression with the meaning 'to perform the illocutionary act that is characteristically achieved by uttering that expression (or an utterance containing it)'. Typical examples in chick lit are verbs derived from interjections that perform complimentary or dialogic speech acts. These forms do not only have a "saying" sense (to say *X*), but also an "actional" sense (to perform the actions implied by *X*):

(7) *The waiter mm-hhms [originally in italics] appreciatively beside me, and I look up at him. "We'll check out the menu"* [22].

(8) *And now Suze is umming and ahhing over about six family tiaras while I take sips of champagne* [17].

From the perspective of word-formation theory, such coinages challenge the Open-Class Base Hypothesis [23], which predicts that only open-class categories may serve as productive bases for new lexical items. Since interjections are traditionally classified as a closed class, their conversion into verbs may seem to represent a creative or even exceptional process. However, as L. Brinton [24, p. 140] points out, the conversion of interjections to verbs, while seemingly novel, is not entirely unique to Present-Day English. Once formed, these verbs behave like regular members of the verbal category: they take standard verbal morphology and can be used productively in context. Corpus evidence also confirms their use

as converted verbs [25]. At the same time, their stylistic load is evident: *mm-hhm* is converted into a verb that captures not just speech but embodied approval while *umming and ahing* is used phrasally (*umming and ahing over*) to dramatise hesitation and indecision. The decisive factor for including such formations in a dataset of neologisms is their extravagance. All of them exploit the immediacy and dialogic flavour characteristic of chick lit and, therefore, should be treated as context-bound neologisms: creative less in terms of introducing a new morphological process, and more in the way they dramatise interpersonal acts of communication and blur the boundary between “saying” and “doing.”

Notably, blending is absent from the category of pattern-adhering form-based F-creativity. This might be because blends are generally not fully compliant with established morphological rules. As argued by H. Marchand [26], blending can be considered extrasystemic, in that it does not operate through stable, rule-governed patterns but rather through the truncation and fusion of lexical material in ways that are often unpredictable and structurally opaque.

Pattern-bending creativity

Moving along the continuum toward greater innovation, pattern-bending emerges, encompassing cases where a neologism follows a familiar morphological pattern but deliberately violates one or more of its typical constraints – both internal and external. In affixations, the internal constraints violated are:

- semantic constraints concerned with cases where the referent of the base must follow certain semantic requirement [27, p. 349] like, for instance in *nature-y*:

(9) *The window is full of gorgeous books, folders, boxes and cushions – all covered in hand-blocked prints of trees, birds, and other nature-y stuff* [21].

In the above example from S. Kinsella’s “Shopaholic and Baby,” the protagonist Becky Bloomwood uses the word *nature-y* to describe a group of aesthetic objects. The suffix *-y* is typically used with concrete, material nouns that describe sensory or physical qualities (e.g., *muddy, cloudy, fishy, spiky*). The base *nature*, however, is abstract and broad. It’s not easily associated with a tangible or descriptive property in the way *mud* or *cloud* are. This makes the derivation *nature-y* semantically unusual stretching the meaning of $[X + -y]_{Adj}$. What’s being “bent” is the typical semantic domain in which *-y* operates – from the concrete (*grassy, milky*) to the abstract (*nature-y*).

Another representative example is the prefixation with *un-* forming verbs and adjectives:

(10) ‘*You are fired.*’ *Alex’s voice is like a bullet.* ‘*End of.*’
‘*You can’t do that!*’ *I cry, outraged.* ‘*Un-fire her!*’ [28].

The prefix *un-* is highly productive in English, most typically with telic verbs to form reversative or privative meanings (e.g., *untie, unlock*), or with adjectives to create direct negations (*unhappy*). In the creative coinages under discussion, however, *un-* is extended beyond its usual semantic domain, producing forms whose meanings deliberately clash with encyclopaedic knowledge and real-world logic. Such constraints can be contextually overridden in certain registers – for instance, in video-game discourse, where *unkill* may mean ‘bring a character back to life’ despite being impossible in real-world terms [20].

In *un-fire* (10), the speaker applies *un-* to a telic verb (*fire* ‘dismiss from a job’). While *fire* is indeed telic, the act is not normally reversible in real-world terms; once a dismissal occurs, it cannot literally be undone. Here, the prefix activates the reversative

schema but clashes with encyclopaedic knowledge, producing a humorous, wish-fulfilling effect;

- category constraints which block certain derivational morphology processes from applying to bases of the “wrong part of speech.” One representative example is *clippy*:

(11) ‘*I am very pleased to see you, Bridget,*’ *he said, taking my arm.* ‘*Your mother has the entire Northamptonshire constabulary poised to comb the county with toothbrushes for your dismembered remains. Come and demonstrate your presence so I can start enjoying myself. How’s the be-wheeled suitcase?*’ ‘*Big beyond all sense. How are the ear-hair clippers?*’ ‘*Oh, marvelously – you know – clippy*’ [30].

In this example from H. Fielding’s “Bridget Jones’s Diary,” the lexical item *clippy* is used by Bridget’s father to describe a pair of ear-hair clippers he received as a holiday gift from his wife. The word is attested in “Urban Dictionary” [31], where it is defined as referring to ‘the Microsoft paperclip assistant.’ However, in the context of the novel (11), *clippy* is not used as a noun but as an adjective, meaning ‘able to clip’ or ‘having the property of clipping.’ The idea that *knives are knifey* and *clippers are clippy* may seem intuitively transparent, but such qualitative adjectives are generally not codified by the language system, likely due to their redundancy or marginal semantic contribution. From a morphological perspective, the formation of *clippy* represents a bending of the well-established English $[X + -y]_{Adj}$ pattern, in which the suffix *-y* attaches to a noun base to form an adjective (e.g., *fishy, trendy, sugary*). What is notable in this case is that the base appears to be the verb *clip*, rather than the more expected noun *clipper*. The result is a deverbal adjective, which is relatively rare and morphologically unconventional within this schema;

- morphological constraints – when the morphological structure of the base determines what kind of affixes may attach to it, like, for instance in *smoldering-ness*:

(12) *I forced myself to look across, with an attempt at smoldering-ness* [17].

While the suffix *-ness* is highly productive in English, it typically attaches to simple, canonical adjectives (e.g., *kind* → *kindness*, *dark* → *darkness*). Its application to the participial form *smoldering* represents a deviation from morphological norms. *Smoldering* functions as a deverbal adjective, derived from the verb *to smolder*, and is often used to describe a sultry or intense emotional state (*a smoldering look*). Although *-ness* can technically attach to such participial adjectives (e.g., *frighteningness, boringness*), doing so is relatively rare and introduces a marked, performative tone;

- phonological constraints which affect what kind of sound structures are allowed. One example is *Prada-y*:

(13) *With a surge of excitement, I hurry towards the Barkers Center. I won’t go mad, I promise myself. Just one little treat to see me through. I’ve already got my cardigan – so not clothes ... and I bought some new kitten heels the other day – so not that ... although there are some nice Prada-y type shoes in Hobbs ... Hmmm. I am not sure* [32].

The suffix *-y* typically attaches to monosyllabic or disyllabic bases ending in consonants, and preferably those with a strong final stress. These ensure smooth integration without awkward vowel clashes or prosodic dissonance. The base *Prada* ends in an unstressed open vowel (/ə/) and the suffix *-y* adds another unstressed high front vowel (/i/) resulting in a vowel-vowel sequence that is phonologically awkward in English. This form bends a phonological

constraint as English derivational suffixes usually avoid attaching directly to vowel-final bases without inserting a buffer or causing reanalysis. So, while *Prada-y* is pronounceable, it's phonotactically marked, which adds to its playful, performative tone.

A good example of external constraints violation is *hump-ist* in the following excerpt:

(14) *And Eric is such a sweet loving guy. It's not his fault his back was damaged when he was a baby. And he's achieved so much. He's inspiring.* – *Now I am hot with shame. Maybe my husband does have a hump. I shouldn't be **hump-ist*** [21].

The categorical meaning of Adj_{ist} is the one of quality, namely a) relating to or showing a particular political/religious belief and b) treating people unfair because of something. The English lexicon includes several surface realisations of these semantic mappings. Derivatives following the $[\text{N} + \text{-ist}]_{\text{Adj}}$ pattern are subject to constraints shaped not only by internal linguistic rules but also by extralinguistic factors, such as cultural relevance or social salience. To word *sexist* illustrate this. It directly encodes the meaning of 'making unfair distinctions between men and women.' The form *sexist* emerged in 1965, derived from the noun *sex* and modelled morphologically and semantically on *racist*. It was coined by Pauline M. Leet, director of special programs at Franklin and Marshall College, in a speech circulated via mimeograph among feminists. The word gained broader visibility through its use in print in Caroline Bird's introduction to "Born Female" (1968) [33].

The acceptability of the form *sexist* is not driven solely by grammatical principles (i.e., competence-oriented rules), but rather by performance-oriented factors linked to world knowledge and sociopolitical context [29, p. 864]. Its coinage coincided with the rise of second-wave feminism and the women's liberation movement in the United States during the 1960s, which provided the sociocultural motivation for its uptake and lexicalisation. By contrast, the surface form *hump-ist*, 'someone who holds a bias or negative attitude toward people with humps,' constitutes a clear violation of these constraints. It represents an ungrammatical or at least non-conventional coinage, created to satisfy an immediate communicative need. However, due to its lack of semantic plausibility and sociocultural grounding, it remains low in acceptability and has not been attested in major contemporary English dictionaries (cf. [14]).

Notably, my database of neologisms did not register cases of pattern-bending F-creativity among compounds. This can be attributed to the nature of compounding itself. As a word-formation process, compounding is characterised by a high degree of structural flexibility and reliance on analogy, allowing for a wide range of formally and semantically acceptable combinations [8]. As a result, coinages that might otherwise be considered deviations are typically accommodated within the existing system.

However, compounding does reveal pattern-bending instances when hybridised with other morphological processes. One recurrent pattern is the merge of compounding and suffixation, as illustrated by *Monday-morning-ish* in the following excerpt:

(15) *It's mid December, but there's no Christmas spirit here. Everyone's too tense and cold and **Monday-morning-ish*** [28].

The coinage of *monday-morning-ish* involves a two-step creative process. First, the noun phrase *Monday morning* undergoes lexicalisation to form a compound. Second, the adjectival suffix *-ish* is added, yielding a form that functions as a gradable, subjective descriptor of a mood typically associated with the lethargy,

irritability, or lack of motivation often experienced at the start of the working week. The innovation lies in applying a familiar suffix to a syntactically complex, multi-word base, which results in a structurally deviant form.

Although, as indicated earlier, blending is considered by some scholars to be an extrasystemic process [26], there are nevertheless certain regularities that characterise it. In particular, blends typically involve constituents that stand in paradigmatic relation, combining elements drawn from the same semantic category [34], and they rely on the recognisability of their source words, which is widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in both blend formation and processing [34]. It is precisely these regularities that are "bent" in the blends attested in my dataset, where formally and semantically incompatible elements are fused, often resulting in a reduced degree of source-word recognisability and, consequently, a loss of interpretability in the absence of contextual support, like in the following excerpt:

(16) *No, no, 'said Tom. 'It's a fin-de-millennium way of dealing with the nightmare of relationships. All friendships between men and women are based on the sexual dynamic. The mistake people make is ignoring this, then getting upset when their friend doesn't shag them.'*

'I'm not getting upset,' muttered Shazzer.

'What about friends when neither fancies the other?' said Jude.

'Doesn't happen. Sex is what drives it. "Friends" is a bad definition.'

'Pashminas, 'I slurred, slurping on my Chardonnay.

*'That's it!' said Tom excitedly. 'It's fin-de-millennium **pashminism**, Shazzer is Simon's "pashmina" because she wants to shag him most so he diminishes her...'*

*"...Simon is Shazzer's **pashmaster**."*

... we could come up with a list of further definitions, as follows:

***Pashmincer:** A friend who you really fancy who's actually gay. ...*

***Pashmarried:** A friend who you used to go out with and is now married with children who likes having you around as memory of old life but makes you feel like mad barren pod-womb imagining vicar is in love with self.*

***Ex-pashspurt:** An ex-partner who wants to get back with you but pretends just to want to be friends then keeps making passes and getting cross.*

*"What about '**pash-hurts**'?" said Shaz sulkily. "Friends who turn your own private emotional disaster into a sociological study at the expense of your feelings" [35].*

In this scene from H. Fielding's "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason," Bridget and her friends reflect on a cross-gender friendship marked by asymmetrical sexual attraction. As no established lexical label exists for this type of relationship, Bridget and Tom readily coin one on the spot. The resulting new word is grounded in embodied metonymy, whereby external bodily markers, such as clothing, function as a visible canvas for social meaning [36]. *Pashmina* – a soft garment typically worn by women around their shoulders [14] – provides warmth while remaining easily removable, unlike more structured outerwear. These salient properties are mapped onto the female participant in the relationship, who is metonymically construed as a source of emotional or physical "warmth" that can be readily discarded by her male friend. This metonymic mapping is subsequently extended to the abstract relational level in *pashmina-ism*, which encapsulates

the asymmetrical and utilitarian nature of the relationship itself, and the blends that follow.

Pashmaster designates a man who holds emotional or sexual power over a female friend – a “master” of one’s desire. *Pashmarried* adapts the same splinter in a blend, referring to a former partner who, now married, keeps the woman emotionally tethered in an ambiguous friendship. Similarly, *pashhurt* combines *pash-* with the verb *hurt*, yielding a noun that categorises men who exploit women’s emotional vulnerabilities under the guise of friendship. *Pashmincer* is particularly inventive, blending *pash-* with *mincer* (slang for a stereotypically effeminate gay man), to create a humorous yet complex term referring to a man whom a woman finds attractive, but who is unavailable due to sexual orientation. Finally, *ex-pashspurt* is an ex-partner who re-emerges in a woman’s life under the pretence of friendship but cannot resist making advances – a person who keeps “spurring” forward inappropriate or confusing emotional or sexual gestures, often unpredictably. In all cases, the intended meanings are not directly recoverable from the formal composition of the blends alone but are instead inferred through the immediate narrative context and shared knowledge of the character’s (Shazzer’s) relationships, which provides the necessary interpretive support.

Conversion also demonstrates potential for pattern-bending F-creativity, particularly in noun-to-verb formations. This process is exemplified in:

(17) *I altered my path to pass his table, at which he immersed himself deep in conversation with trollop, glancing up as I walked past and giving me a firm, confident smile as if to say “business meeting.” I gave him a look which said, “Don’t you **business meeting** me,” and strutted on [30].*

The syntactic position in which *business meeting* functions in (17) clearly signals its use as a verb formed by conversion from the compound noun *business meeting*, where *meeting* is the head noun and *business* serves as a premodifier [14]. While conversion of compound nouns into verbs is conventional in English [37, p. 67], the coinage *business meeting* as a verb is defective in terms of morphological productivity: forms like *business meetinged/met* or *business meetinging* are difficult to imagine in actual use. This partial productivity suggests that the formation bends an established derivational pattern – repurposing a familiar compound structure into a new syntactic category while limiting its paradigmatic flexibility.

P. Hohenhaus [38, pp. 28–29], borrowing from H. Brekle [39], categorises such formations as instances of delocutive conversion – verbs that arise from speech act expressions, even without direct citation of a specific utterance. These delocutives often emerge in metacommunicative or confrontational contexts, especially in expressions like “Don’t you ___ me” [38], where the speaker appropriates linguistic material previously used against them. In this case, the protagonist’s utterance “Don’t you *business meeting* me” satirically mimics and rejects the male character’s implausible excuse that the encounter is a legitimate business meeting. This moment of neologisation operates not only as a linguistic joke but as a social and emotional strategy: it allows the speaker to confront deceit and assert loyalty to her friend without explicitly naming the betrayal.

Although clipping is a well-attested morphological process in English, it is relatively uncommon in English language chick lit. In contrast to other word-formation strategies such as affixation,

compounding, or blending, clippings occur infrequently in this genre. This scarcity may stem from the limited expressive potential of clippings, which typically aim for brevity and economy rather than the elaborate stylistic or affective functions often foregrounded in chick lit. In my dataset, only a handful of clipping-based neologisms were identified, yet they offer insightful cases of pattern-bending and pattern-appropriation form-based F-creativity. One example of the former can be illustrated by *tregs* in the following excerpt:

(18) *There’s an awkward pause while I wait for him to sit down; in fact, I start to feel quite impatient as he hovers uncertainly in the middle of the room. Then suddenly I realize he’s waiting for me to sit down, and hastily sink down onto the sofa.*

“Would you like a titchy?” I ask politely.

“Bit early,” says Tarquin, with a nervous laugh.

(“Titchy” is Tarquin-speak for drink, by the way. And trousers are “tregs” and... you get the picture) [32].

Formed from the base word *trousers*, *tregs* does not follow the conventional clipping patterns typically described in morphological literature. It is neither a straightforward back-clipping (*trous*), nor a fore-clipping (*sers*), nor a transparent mid-clipping like *fridge* (< *(re)frige(rator)*). Instead, *tregs* represents a non-canonical or pattern-bending instance of clipping that preserves the initial consonant cluster *tr-* but replaces the remainder of the word with the rhyme-driven ending *-egs*, which is phonologically salient but etymologically unrelated to the original word. It aligns phonologically with other informal plurals in English (e.g., *regs*, *kegs*, *legs*). This substitution maintains the plural number of the original noun and results in a form that is short, rhythmically strong, and easily integrated into informal discourse.

As established in morphological literature, clipping is generally constrained by the principle that the truncated form should remain identifiable and cognitively accessible to the language user [40]. However, in the case of *tregs*, which purports to derive from *trousers*, the connection between source and outcome is far from transparent out of the context. This creative deviation also signals a pattern-bending instance of morphological innovation: while the form aligns structurally with clippings, its low recoverability and high reliance on contextual cues for interpretation underscore a subversion of expected norms.

Pattern-appropriation creativity

As discussed in the introduction, pattern-appropriation creativity involves cases in which elements of fixed constructions are substituted with contextually salient alternatives. This type of creativity is manifested mainly in compounds, as illustrated by the following example:

(19) *Yayy! Have broken through 150lb **glass floor** (though may have been through standing on one leg and slightly leaning on washbasin [17].*

The compound *glass floor* offers an example of component substitution in an established pattern. Formed analogously to the well-established metaphorical compound *glass ceiling* – which denotes an invisible barrier to professional advancement, especially for women – *glass floor* in this instance reconfigures the metaphor to suit a new context: body image and weight loss. Structurally, *glass floor* preserves the N + N compound format of *glass ceiling*, maintaining its metaphorical logic. However, rather than representing a limit one cannot rise above, it represents a perceived lower boundary – a weight threshold the speaker feels unable to fall

below. The metaphor thus works in ironic reversal: where the *glass ceiling* signifies systemic constraint, the *glass floor* ironically marks a personal, internalised limit, infused with both anxiety and humour. Semantically, this compound reflects F-creative compounding in its repurposing of an entrenched metaphor (*glass + spatial barrier*) and substitution of the directional frame (floor instead of ceiling), resulting in a fresh yet intelligible construct.

E-creativity

As described in the introduction, form-based E(mergent)-creativity encompasses cases in which new morphological patterns are innovated, rather than existing patterns being bent or appropriated. In the English language chick lit corpus, instances of E-creativity are relatively scarce, reflecting the cognitive and communicative constraints on introducing novel forms. From a Relevance Theory perspective [41], new forms are only likely to be produced when the additional processing effort required by the reader is offset by sufficient cognitive or narrative payoff. Likewise, Optimality Theory-informed perspectives on linguistic innovation (e.g. [42]) emphasise the role of structural constraints and ranked preferences in shaping novel forms: entirely new morphological schemas emerge only when they can be successfully interpreted within the narrative or social context.

The following examples illustrate how English language chick lit authors occasionally exploit these conditions to create entirely novel morphological patterns.

Among the various morphological processes attested in the genre, compounding stands out as one of the two processes involved in pattern-creation, giving rise to a distinctive phenomenon that I label “decompounding” – a process whereby an existing compound is reanalysed and split into its constituents, which then function as a syntactic phrase rather than a lexical unit. This process can be seen in the following examples:

(20) *Sir David Allbright is chairman of the board. He's total bigwig, even bigger and wiggier than Simon* [21].

(21) *By the next evening, my heart has hipped and hopped all over the place. I am getting ready for supper, staring at myself in the tiny cracked mirror in my room (everything here is old and picturesque), unable to think about anything except: what are my chances?* [43].

The fragment (20) features the attested noun – the solid idiomatic compound *bigwig*, which is the product of one-off instance of word-formation conveying the meaning of ‘an important person,’ ‘a great man, person of consequence’ [14]. The compound is a combination of *big*_{Adj} + *wig*_N, dating to the 18th century in reference to the imposing wigs formerly worn by men of rank or authority [14]. The present-day sense of the word is idiomatic and figurative: it is derived from the relationship between the wig as a mark of a well-bred man, a status symbol for people flaunting their wealth [44] and a high-flyer.

In line with the principles of idiomaticity – specifically, the opacity and inseparability of compound elements – *bigwig* resists decomposition into its literal components. Yet, the neologism in the excerpt (20) splits this fixed compound into its constituents, *big* and *wig*, treating them as independent comparative adjectives. This involves a transcategorisation of *wig* from noun to adjective, violating standard grammatical and morphological conventions. Such reanalysis is an instance of what I label “decompounding,” a pattern-creating process that defies established morphological

rules by transforming a lexicalised compound into a syntactically productive phrase.

The excerpt (21) illustrates another novel instance of decompounding. Traditionally, *hip-hop* functions as a compound noun referring to a genre of music and cultural movement, with no transparent internal syntax. In (21), however, the compound is deconstructed into *hipped* and *hopped*, each treated as a past participle verb. This reanalysis represents a striking formal innovation: *hip*, which is not conventionally attested as a verb in this sense, is creatively “verbed” through analogy with *hop*, its phonological twin in the original compound. The result is a coordinated verb pair that echoes the rhythmic and expressive character of *hip-hop* while figuratively conveying the speaker’s agitated emotional state – her heart has ‘danced or ricocheted with anxiety and anticipation.’

The second process contributing to pattern-creation in English language chick lit is evident in the following example:

(22) *They do strange things, too. ... Like they call sandwiches ‘witchies.’ Moreover, a drink is a ‘titchy’ (except if it’s water, which is ‘Ho’)* [32].

The term *Ho* is used to refer to *water*. It is not a recognisable clipping, blend, or abbreviation of *water*, and lacks phonological or morphological cues that would enable straightforward recoverability within the linguistic system. Instead, it can be more adequately described as a case of semiotic code-shifting, whereby meaning is transferred from one representational system to another. Specifically, the lexical item is derived from the chemical formula H_2O , which belongs to the domain of scientific notation rather than natural language.

In this process, the speaker maps a non-linguistic symbolic representation onto a linguistic form. The chemical formula is reinterpreted phonologically by isolating its alphabetic components (*H* and *O*) and omitting the numerical index, resulting in the sequence *Ho*. This transformation involves both modal shift (from visual-symbolic to phonological-linguistic code) and structural reduction, producing a form that functions as a lexical item in everyday discourse.

This process does not conform to any standard word-formation mechanisms such as blending, compounding, or affixation. Instead, it represents a cross-semiotic strategy, in which linguistic innovation is achieved by importing material from a different semiotic system and adapting it for lexical use. Because this transformation does not follow an existing morphological model, and because there is no productive pattern for systematically converting chemical formulas into everyday lexical items, *Ho* constitutes a clear case of pattern-creation, expanding the boundaries of what counts as a possible source for word formation.

X-creativity

Not all neologisms in the ELCL corpus can be assigned with confidence to a single, transparent word-formation process. A small but analytically valuable group are characterised by morphological ambiguity, where multiple interpretive paths are plausible, but none can be definitively confirmed. These cases highlight the difficulty of applying rigid classificatory frameworks to highly playful and context-sensitive lexical innovation and are therefore interpreted as instances of X-creativity.

The first two words to be discussed are *scrubious* and *shuffed* in:

(23) *I have this secret vocabulary for my husband. Words I've invented, just to describe him. I've never even told him about them:*

they just pop into my head, now and then. Like...

Scrubscious: the adorable way he scrunches up his face when he's confused, his eyebrows akimbo, his haze imploring, as if to say: 'Explain!' Dan doesn't like to be confused. He likes everything straight. Clear. Out in the open. [...]

Shoffed: when life has turned round and punched him in the face so hard, his breath is literary takes away for a moment [45].

The neologism *scrubscious* presents an instructive case of creativity through an ambiguous morphological pathway. At first glance, it invites two plausible analyses. On the one hand, it may be read as the result of suffixation, with *-ous* attached to an invented or truncated base, which would place it within the bounds of F-creativity, pattern-adhering. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as a blend, combining elements of *scrub/scrunch* with *conscious* or *scrumptious*, likewise a recognised word-formation strategy and therefore still F-creativity. Yet, in both cases the base remains opaque: no single etymological source can be identified with certainty, and the relation between the formal material and the intended meaning ('the adorable way he scrunches his face when confused') is not entirely transparent.

For this reason, *scrubscious* straddles the boundary between F-creativity and X-creativity. If we assume blending or suffixation, the coinage remains pattern-adhering. If, however, the base is deemed non-recoverable, then the item moves into X-creativity, where the precise formation path cannot be assigned to an established word-formation rule. Its creative force therefore lies not only in the evaluative affixal shape (*-ous*) but also in the very indeterminacy of its construction, which leaves open multiple interpretive routes for decoding.

The coinage *shoffed* is even harder to categorise. On the surface, it resembles a past tense verb formation (with *-ed*) used as an adjective, yet its base *shoff* is unattested in English. The semantics – 'to be taken aback, stunned, or knocked breathless by life's blow' – could suggest a playful alteration of *shoved* or *scoffed*. Alternatively, it may be treated as an instance of invented base + suffixation where the formal regularity of *-ed* lends the neologism grammatical legitimacy despite the absence of a recognised stem. The word has onomatopoeic overtones: the initial *sh-* and the abrupt *-off-* cluster give the impression of a sudden blow, puff, or shock (like *shoved* + *scoffed* + *shock*). Overall, the effect is a word that "feels" like a past participle form used as an adjective, while remaining opaque in derivation.

Hence, the neologism *shoffed* exemplifies a case of X-creativity. The coinage is built around an entirely novel root, *shoff-*, which has no prior existence in English and no clear morphological or semantic source. While the form is partially anchored in the familiar morphological paradigm ([V + *-ed*]_{Adj}), the creative core of the word lies in its unprecedented root. This combination situates the term outside the scope of both F-creativity, which relies on conventional and predictable word-formation processes, and E-creativity, which stretches but still draws upon recognisable lexical material. Instead, *shoffed* embodies X-creativity, in which a wholly new morpheme is introduced into the lexicon, semantically motivated only within the speaker's private context.

Another example to consider is *CFORM* in:

(24) *One day I was wearily typing the wedding announcements and musing on the injustice of it all when I came across a word I couldn't read. Many of our brides filled their forms in by hand. This particular bride had written in looping cursive, in purple ink, a word that looked like CFORM.*

I carried the form over to Raji, another cub reporter. "What's this say?"

He squinted at the purple. "CFORM," he read slowly. "Like MDOS, or something."

"For a dress, though?"

Raji shrugged. He'd grown up in New York City, then attended Columbia Journalism School. The ways of Central Pennsylvanians were strange to him. I headed back to my desk; Raji went back to his dread chore, typing in a week's worth of school lunch menus. "Tater Tot," I heard him sigh. "Always, the Tater Tot."

Which left me with CFORM. Under "contact for questions" the bride had scribbled her home phone number. I picked up the phone, and dialed.

"Hello?" answered a cheerful-sounding woman.

"Hello," I said, "this is Candace Shapiro calling from the Valley Times. I'm trying to reach Sandra Garry."

"This is Sandy," chirped the woman.

"Hi, Sandy. Listen, I do the wedding announcements here, and I'm reading your form and there's a word... C-FORM?"

"Seafoam," she answered promptly. In the background I could hear a kid screaming, "Ma!" and what sounded like a soap opera on TV. "That's the color of my dress" [13].

On the surface, *CFORM* appears as an opaque string of letters, suggestive of a bureaucratic abbreviation (*CFORM* as in *MDOS*, *ECON*, or other institutional acronyms). The reporter, guided by the conventions of journalistic work and digital register, interprets it as such. However, the "real" intended word is *seafoam*, a straightforward lexical item denoting a pale greenish-blue colour. This orthographic distortion results not from deliberate play but from semi-literacy, which nevertheless generates a moment of linguistic creativity.

From a morphological perspective, *CFORM* can be decomposed systematically. First, the initial *C* represents a phonetic clipping of *sea*, a substitution widely attested in non-standard spelling practices (e.g. *c u later*). Second, *foam* is reanalysed as *form*, a high-frequency orthographic cluster that replaces the less familiar *foam*. The result is a phono-orthographic hybrid: *sea* → *c* (clipped spelling), *foam* → *form* (orthographic analogy).

The type of creativity here is therefore best categorised as F-creativity: the formation follows linguistically motivated principles of substitution and analogy rather than random invention. Yet, the ambiguity of *CFORM* gives rise to a secondary layer of creativity in its interpretation. The newsroom colleague, confronted with the opaque form, re-lexicalises it as an apparent acronym ("like *MDOS*"), which exemplifies X-creativity, since it relies on an imaginative misreading unconstrained by morphological rules.

Thus, this single item encapsulates two distinct processes: (1) the writer's semi-literate yet systematic misspelling, producing a fixed creative form, and (2) the reader's interpretative leap, transforming the opaque sequence into a pseudo-acronym through X-creativity. The *CFORM* example therefore illustrates not only how creative word-forms may emerge unintentionally, but also how their perceived meaning depends on the interaction between production and reception.

Conclusion. The analysis revealed a markedly uneven distribution of form-based creativity in English language chick lit. F-creativity is by far the most prevalent, reflecting the corpus-wide tendency to exploit established morphological schemas in playful

but recognisable ways. This tendency can be interpreted through the lens of H. Clark's [46] and Bell's [47] audience-design model in sociolinguistics: authors appear to calibrate their lexical innovations to the presumed competence and expectations of their implied readers. In chick lit, the implied reader is not merely a consumer of narrative but a collaborator in linguistic play – expected to recognise, appreciate, and laugh at neologisms that sit at the boundary of the familiar. From this perspective, the predominance of pattern-adhering F-creative forms reflect an acute authorial sensitivity to the cognitive comfort zone of a culturally positioned readership.

E-creativity, involving entirely novel morphological patterns, is rare. Its emergence depends on conditions in which contextual cues, narrative relevance, and cognitive payoff allow the innovation to be interpretable, consistent with Relevance Theory and Optimality Theory-informed perspectives on structural constraint. X-creativity is similarly scarce, comprising neologisms whose morphological ambiguity allows multiple plausible analyses but prevents definitive interpretation. Such forms impose a high cognitive load and are difficult to process, and therefore are used sparingly, typically for striking, humorous, or highly stylistic effect.

Overall, the patterns observed suggest that authors of English language chick lit strategically navigate the tension between creativity and comprehensibility, privileging forms that maximise expressive novelty while remaining accessible to an audience attuned to the playful possibilities of language.

Future research should extend the analysis beyond form-based creativity to include meaning-based creativity, examining how semantic novelty, metaphorical extension, pragmatic enrichment, and evaluative framing contribute to the creation of neologisms. Also, further study is needed to explore how form-based and meaning-based creativity co-evolve within the same lexical items, producing neologisms that are not only structurally innovative but also strategically effective in conveying humour, social positioning, characterisation, and ideological nuance.

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Белова М. Формальна креативність неологізмів в англomовній чік-літ

Ця стаття присвячена дослідженню формальної лінгвістичної креативності, що виявляється у неологізмах англomовної чік-літ – жанрі постфеміністичного жіночого дискурсу. У центрі уваги перебувають лексичні інновації, які виникають як унаслідок конвенційного, так і неконвенційного використання англійських словотвірних моделей. Матеріалом дослідження слугує укладений авторкою корпус із 35 романів жанру чік-літ, у яких неологізми виконують важливу соціально-прагматичну функцію, сприяючи конструюванню ідентичності, соціальному позиціонуванню, соціальному

коментарю/критиці, підризу соціальних ієрархій, а також реалізації стратегій ввічливості та пом'якшення. Аналіз ґрунтується на концепції формальної креативності, яка розглядає креативність як континуум і трактує креативний неологізм як результат взаємодії між нормативним словотвором і свідомим відхиленням від усталених моделей. У статті досліджуються основні морфологічні механізми креативного словотворення, зокрема афіксація, словоскладання, телескопія, конверсія та усичення. Особливу увагу приділено тому, як звичні словотвірні схеми експлуатуються та модифікуються задля досягнення ефекту висунення та посилення наративного впливу. На основі проведеного аналізу у статті уточнюється наявний континуум формальної креативності шляхом виокремлення додаткових підтипів. До них належать фіксована креативність, що охоплює інновації за моделями дотримання словотвірних шаблону, його модифікації та апропріації, емерджентна креативність, пов'язана зі створенням нових словотвірних моделей, а також Х-креативність, позначена непередбачуваністю та ідіосинкратичністю. Такі механізми свідчать про високий рівень формальної винахідливості у межах жанру. Результати дослідження демонструють, що неологізми в англomовній чік-літ є не лише ігровими мовними прикрасами, а системними засобами творчого самовираження, укоріненими у морфологічній компетенції та жанрових конвенціях. У висновках окреслено перспективи подальших досліджень смислової креативності та її взаємозв'язку з формальною інноваційністю в сучасній англomовній художній прозі.

Ключові слова: лінгвістична креативність, формальна креативність, неологізм, морфологічні конвенції, англomовна чік-літ.

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