

In the first chapter of *Seven Beauties*, Csicsery-Ronay's discusses a feature of science fiction called "Fictive Neology." What this means is that science fiction stories contain new, made-up words that make the stories sound like they are referring to things that exist in their made-up worlds but that don't exist in our worlds. The more convincing these words are, to paraphrase Csicery-Ronay, the more successful a work of science fiction is in "creating an illusion of projected historical reality." The new words that you find in science fiction show how the society in the story has evolved from our own society; the new, made-up words indicate that there are new things in this other, perhaps future world that aren't--or haven't been discovered in--our present-day world. "In all cases, science-fictional neologisms will represent the social-evolutionary powers that dominate that fictive world's history."

"Readers of SF anticipate words and sentences that refer to changed or alien worlds." These words are "fictive signa novi, signs of the new." "Fictive neologies have a paradoxical function....The more convincing it is in creating an illusion of projected historical reality, the more successful the neology. Yet fictive neology also displays that it is fiction. Because the future cannot exist yet, we know that the neology is a playful, poetic conjuring device, suggesting that any imaginable future is always a poetic construction."

"In everyday languages, neologies have many functions. They may name phenomena that until recently had no names—things and practices that have been newly discovered, invented, or imagined by a community. Or, they may be less denotative than rhetorical and poetic, drawing attention to a group's style of discourse." "A new word is a new source of power, which may originate from artistic invention, technical gnosis, or from the user's privileged access to new things at the leading edge of history."

"Languages usually accommodate social and cultural change through new vocabulary and usage. This accommodation is especially true when communities establish connections with foreign cultures or undergo technoscientific transformations." "In social life, most neologisms are invented and introduced in three areas of discourse: scientific technolects (technical terminology), the language of institutions and markets, and slang." "A new scientific term often calls attention to its linguistic newness."

"The second major domain of neology is social exchange, especially markets and institutions, where new objects and practices are introduced into, and classified for, social life. Here, words for commodities, customs, procedures, and social innovations are generated in a variety of ways. They might be loanwords, if they are of foreign origin; they might be transposed or metaphorical terms from other practices; they might be outright inventions. Their purpose is simultaneously to make the new referent seem fresh and interesting, yet also easy to employ in everyday languages. "The main sources of such neologisms are advertising and commercial discourse" although "Another important source of social-exchange neology is the language of social science.... Ego, incentive, aggression, culture, ethnicity, behavior, attitude, role, tribe, minority—all have been important concepts in the social sciences, and have returned to general usage with new connotations gained from their terminological use."

"The third domain of neologogenesis is subcultural appropriation, the restless invention of new terms for objects and practices that already have familiar, normal names." This is, simply, slang.

Science fiction stories often contain made-up slang terms to show that they are referring to a different, perhaps future, culture.

“In a linguistically dynamic culture, where language is constantly being invented and recast in tandem with social-technological changes and cultural contacts, people become accustomed to learning new terms quickly.”

However, “It is rare to find many early sf works in which imaginary neologisms are common currency, while in post-World War II—especially post-1960s—sf the saturation of real social discourse with neologisms licenses writers to increase their density in their fiction.”

“If sf is a quintessentially estranging genre, it is in imaginary neologies that this estrangement is most economically condensed. Imaginary neologies stand out from other words as knots of estrangement, drawing together the threads of imaginary reference with those of known language.” “All neologies seem to offer some new knowledge about the world. To get on with the sentence and the story, the reader must imagine what tacit knowledge went before to make the particular new meanings possible.”

“SF writers customarily slip...neosemes into the narratives, sometimes to intimate a microcosmic social history through a verbal jump cut, sometimes to disrupt the reader’s attempt to construct just such a history.” Another “neosemic sf trope [is] the literalization of metaphor resulting from a technoscientific contextual shift, a discovery or invention that converts and imaginative future into a deadpan denotation.”

In addition to **neologisms** (new words), there are also **neosemes** in science fiction, meaning familiar words that have new and different meanings (Csicsery-Ronay gives several examples of these in his text, many of which are humorous).

“Science-fictional neology operates between two termini. At the first are **neosemes**, semantic shifts of words and sentences that remain familiar in structure and appearance, but have been appropriated by imaginary new social conditions to mean something new.” “Science-fictional neosemes correspond to sf-extrapolation; they are imaginative extensions of historical and current linguistic practice. At the other terminus is **neologism** in the strong sense, the invention of new words that have no histories.” Neologisms have the “ability to evoke imaginary differences of culture and consciousness. SF neologisms are constructed on analogy with strange words in natural languages, on the model of normal speakers encountering the language of newly discovered foreign cultures.” “Radically new words, in contrast with neosemes, give a sense of distance and otherness.”

In practice, SF writers use both neosemes and neologisms. “Most sf neologies are playful combinations of arbitrary poetics connotations and established techniques of making new words out of old ones.”

“In most sf, semantic shifts are subtle and unmarked. They invite readers to supply the missing links themselves....it is precisely this challenge to readers to infer a given sf milieu from specific semantic implications that distinguishes the genre from...’mundane fiction.’” “SF

readers...actively supply imaginary new referents that will give rational meaning to the implied science-fictional neosemes.... With each sentence we have to ask what in the world of the tale would have to be different from our world for such a sentence to be uttered.”

While early SF authors use fictive neology sparingly if at all, “In the United States...the general trend, beginning with the Gernsback era, has been toward the use of more and more fictive neology.”

In some SF stories, such as Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* or Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, the entire English language in the future has mutated into a barely recognizable new form. Finally, in SF we also find entirely new languages, often belonging to alien species (e.g., Klingon from *Star Trek*).