Financial Buzzwords: Language Change and Corpus Analysis
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Language changes and evolves based on the needs and demands of society, and the advent of new words is no exception. In today’s culture, this usually relates to pop culture memes and tropes that are spread through viral videos on the Internet and the subsequent diffusion of new slang words that are largely ephemeral in nature; however, serious socioeconomic events can have broader and longer lasting impacts on language. This paper examines the use of new financial terms, such as *underwater*, in order to show a quantifiable correlation between these terms and socioeconomic events using corpus analysis. The surge in financial ‘buzzwords’ in mainstream usage correlates to the housing market crash and the overall downturn of the economy from 2007 onward and shows that while some language change is internally motivated, the advent of these new words and shifts in meaning is a direct result of economic events in society.

My analysis includes data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) in order to quantify this language change as a result of the events in the economy. The data show an increased usage in *underwater* as well as other relevant finance-related words, such as *subprime*, *crisis*, and *liar's loan/liar loan*. Based on the data within COCA, the financial ‘buzzwords’ show changes in meaning over time as well as an increased frequency of usage. The data support the idea of language as a complex system comprised of choices of lexical items that vary according to their frequency of usage. This includes an analysis of the most frequent collocates of the words and how those have changed over the span of the corpus (1990 – 2012) to show differences in how these words are used before and after the financial crisis of 2007, as well as overall frequency profiles of the words at different points in time to show an increase in general usage.

References