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Acronyms and Abbreviations in Modern English Language

Abstract

Language is constantly evolving in response to the needs of its users. In English, numerous concepts are often conveyed through phrases or compound words, as such expressions enable a precise and comprehensive representation of the essential and sufficient features of each concept. Due to the considerable length of some terms, it is sometimes necessary to apply various methods of shortening. One of the most prominent changes in contemporary language use is the shortening or clipping of words and phrases. This process, referred to in linguistics as word shortening, plays a significant role in both spoken and written communication. People shorten words to save time, minimize effort, and adapt language to modern forms of interaction such as messaging and social media. Although shortening is often linked to informal language, it is also commonly found in academic, professional, and technical contexts. Although word formation in English is an area or a part of considerable interest in linguistic studies, it is regarded as a controversial field due to its complex nature.

Keywords: *shortenings, lexico-semantic relation, lexical unit, spoken and written language, communication*

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Müasir ingilis dilində akronimlər və qısaltmalar

Xülasə

Dil istifadəçilərinin tələblərinə uyğun olaraq fasiləsiz şəkildə dəyişir və inkişaf edir. İngilis dilində bir çox anlayış çoxsözlü ifadələr və ya mürəkkəb sözlər vasitəsilə təqdim olunur; bu cür quruluşlar anlayışın əsas və yetərli xüsusiyyətlərini dəqiq və əhatəli şəkildə ifadə etməyə imkan yaradır. Lakin bəzi terminlərin uzun olması onların müxtəlif üsullarla qısaldılmasını zəruri edir.Müasir dövrdə dil istifadəsində diqqət çəkən əsas meyillərdən biri söz və ifadələrin qısaldılmasıdır. Dilçilikdə bu hadisə "qısaltma" prosesi kimi tanınır və həm şifahi, həm də yazılı ünsiyyətdə əhəmiyyətli yer tutur. İnsanlar vaxt itkisinin qarşısını almaq, ünsiyyəti daha səmərəli etmək və dili sosial media və mesajlaşma kimi yeni kommunikasiya mühitlərinə uyğunlaşdırmaq məqsədilə sözləri qısaldırlar. Qısaldılmış formalar adətən qeyri-rəsmi üslubla əlaqələndirilsə də, onlar akademik, peşəkar və texniki sahələrdə də geniş tətbiq olunur. İngilis dilində söz yaradıcılığı dilçilik baxımından mühüm və maraqlı tədqiqat sahələrindən biri hesab edilsə də, mürəkkəbliyi səbəbindən bu istiqamət bəzən mübahisəli kimi qiymətləndirilir.

Açar sözlər: *qısaltma sözlər, ünsiyyət, leksik-semantik əlaqə, leksik vahid, şifahi və yazılı dil*

Introduction

The formation of new words in English follows distinctive patterns, which may be classified as productive and non-productive. Among the highly productive processes of word formation are shortenings, which, as is well known, occur in several forms. Shortenings or clippings are undoubtedly a linguistic fact and exist objectively within the language. Like any phenomenon that exists objectively, they cannot be devoid of systematic and regular characteristics.

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According to V. V. Borisov, the linguistic analysis of shortenings is complicated by a number of factors. The difficulty of studying this field is due, on the one hand, to the fact that many of its problems intersect with or are closely related to issues examined in psychology, shorthand writing, and other disciplines, and, on the other hand, to the considerable typological diversity of shortenings. Some of these shortenings can undoubtedly be regarded as fully-fledged lexical units, while others are closer to symbols or similar signs; as a result, the identification of particular types of shortenings may at times present significant difficulties (Borisov, 1972, p. 19). Shortenings or clippings, being primarily associated with specialized vocabulary and thus belonging to the peripheral areas of the lexicon, are highly sensitive to various changes in societal life, particularly those related to the development of science and technology, as well as broader material and social transformations. A key feature of studying shortened lexical units is that, in many cases, their lexico-semantic development reflects the developmental patterns already known from the analysis of full forms. However, whereas certain changes in full forms often occur over centuries, in shortenings or clippings these changes become evident within a few years or even months. Consequently, shortened or clipped lexical units can serve as invaluable material for analyzing specific examples to investigate hypotheses regarding the pathways and directions of lexical semantic development.

Research

The present study focuses on acronyms in contemporary English. Acronyms are sometimes confused with abbreviations; however, an abbreviation is a shortened form of a word or phrase created through the omission of letters while retaining the original meaning. This type of shortening is widely used in written discourse and is often marked by periods, although in modern usage punctuation is sometimes omitted, as in *adj, v, dr, mr*, and so on.Abbreviations are similar in nature to blends,because both blends and abbreviations are amalgamations of parts of different words. Abbreviation differs, however from blending in thet prosodic categories do not play a prominent role. Rather, orthography is of central importance (Plag, 2003, p. 126).

An acronym is a type of shortening formed from the initial letters of a group of words and pronounced as a single word. This method of word formation is becoming increasingly widespread across almost all spheres of human activity, particularly in political and technical vocabulary (Arnold, 1986, p. 143). Unlike abbreviations that are spelled out letter by letter, acronyms—derived from Greek—function as ordinary lexical units. The distinction between these forms is based not only on orthographic shortening, but also on pronunciation and the degree of lexical integration. According to some researchers, since their advent (emergence) in the 20th century, acronyms have been the subject of discussion regarding their definition, formation processes, and usage in language. Acronyms do not replace or eliminate other shortening techniques; rather, they develop based on these methods and complement them. However, as the most advanced form of abbreviation, acronyms sometimes possess qualitatively distinct features. This is particularly due to the fact that not all criteria and methods applied in the study of acronyms are necessarily applicable or equally effective when analyzing other types of shortenings. The rate of development and dissemination of acronyms is also noteworthy. In this respect, reference may be made to the well-known principle that language development does not proceed at a uniform pace: at certain historical stages, this process may accelerate or slow down. Such variation is primarily associated with the influence of extralinguistic factors, most notably the rapid advancement of science and technology (Borisov, 1972, p. 11).

The clipping of an abbreviation as a lexical unit cannot be dissociated from its meaning. An abbreviation is not merely a specific shortened sequence of sounds or phonemes; rather, it constitutes a complex that is intrinsically linked to a clearly defined semantic content. Likewise acronyms must necessarily be associated with particular semantic aspects. In other words, when identifying the models that underlie the creation of new abbreviations, it is more appropriate to consider not only purely formal structural types but also structural-semantic models. As V.Borisov mentioned, “analysis of relatively clearly defined series of acronyms demonstrates that specific structural-semantic patterns govern the formation of these units. Furthermore, there is a discernible tendency toward increased structural complexity in acronyms, reflecting the ongoing evolution and sophistication of abbreviation as a linguistic mechanism (Borisov, 1972, p. 165). In the analysis of acronyms, it has

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been observed that the focus lies not on the outcome, but on the structural-semantic model itself. This model, in turn, is unquestionably recognized as a linguistic unit and holds equal significance alongside the primary lexical units employed in the creation of the acronym. Specifically, with regard to the functions they perform, acronyms can be grouped according to three criteria: morphological features, phonetic properties, and capitalization patterns.

From a ***morphological perspective***, unlike simple abbreviations (such as *mister – Mr.*, *doctor – Dr.*), acronyms function as independent lexemes and are capable of undergoing grammatical modification. For instance, when the plural suffix *-s* is added to the noun *computer*, it becomes *computers*; similarly, when the possessive suffix *'s* is attached to the acronym *NATO*, it is expressed as *NATO's*.

The phonetic property of acronyms requires that they can be pronounced as full words within the sound system of English. This means that acronyms must conform to typical English syllable patterns, permissible consonant and vowel clusters, and stress placement. As a result, acronyms function phonologically as ordinary lexical units rather than as sequences of isolated letters. I.Plag (Plag, 2003, p. 128) notes that "acronyms, being pronounced like regular words, must conform to the phonological patterns of English, which can create problems in applying regular reading rules if the reading out would result in illegal phonological words" (Plag, 2003, p. 128). For an acronym to be pronounced as a word, the sequence of letters must follow the phonotactic rules governing the order of phonemes in English. For example, *NATO* is pronounceable because it follows a consonant–vowel–vowel–vowel pattern. If an acronym does not conform to these phonological rules, it remains pronounced as individual letters, as in *NGHS* (*Hawthorne Global Health Sciences*).

Capitalization characteristics of acronyms: over time, as acronyms become widely used and speakers cease to perceive them merely as shortenings, abbreviations, they undergo lexicalization, lexical form being accepted as standard words. This change is often reflected in their lowercase spelling (e.g., *scuba, laser, radar*), indicating that these elements function no longer as technical shortenings, abbreviations but as ordinary nouns within the language. Such lexicalization illustrates the dynamic integration of acronyms into English vocabulary. The spelling of acronyms may differ with regard to the use of capital letters. Usually capital letters are used, which can be interpreted as a formal device that cleearly links the acronym to its base word. I.Plag points out that some words that historically originated as acronyms are nowadays no longer spelled with capital letters, and for the majority of speakers these forms are no longer related to the words they originally abbreviated (Plag, 2003, p. 128). As noted above, some acronyms lose their capitalization and are accepted as standard words in English. For example, terms such as *laser* (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) (6), *radar* (Radio Detection and Ranging), and *scuba* (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus) (7) are now treated as ordinary lexical items.

The term *RADAR* was initially developed for military purposes but later became so widely used that it is now written in lowercase as a standard word (*radar*). Today, like *radar*, the term *laser* is also written in lowercase and treated as an ordinary noun, with many speakers unaware of its original status as an acronym. Moreover, it can take grammatical forms such as the plural (*lasers*) and attributive usage (*laser technology*). This illustrates how shortenings can undergo lexicalization losing their original abbreviated status in the process (Yule, 2010, p. 58). Importantly, this process demonstrates that shortening does not necessarily reduce, limit vocabulary size but can contribute to its expansion, as acronyms create new words while preserving their meaning.

In her article *"Lexicalization of Abbreviations in English"*, Y. Bennane compiles a table of acronyms and emphasizes that these items were deliberately selected for the study based on the following considerations: a) These acronyms are considered general acronyms (used in general English) and so they are argued to be suitable for our students who are non-specialized subjects; b) These acronyms are also used in Arabic and so they are supposed to be recognized by our subjects. She subsequently outlines the main objective of her research:" The main purpose of our research is to know whether the relation between the acronym and its meaning is stronger than the relation between the acronym and its expanded form, and so choosing unknown acronyms will hold no benefice here" (Bennane, n.d.). This objective is addressed through an analysis of how participants

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comprehend and interpret acronyms without recourse to their full forms. It is anticipated that the results of the study will contribute to identifying the extent of semantic independence that acronyms may develop within the framework of the lexicalization process.

Shortenings, clippings, particularly acronyms, are used so extensively that speakers often forget the longer expressions they originally represented. This indicates that these elements no longer function solely as technical abbreviations, clippings but operate as ordinary nouns within the language. In contemporary language, acronyms play a crucial role in simplifying complex expressions and making communication more efficient. They are widely used across diverse fields, including science, technology, medicine, politics, education, and popular culture. As society becomes more technologically advanced and information-rich, there is an increasing demand for concise and easily recognizable terms, which explains the growing popularity of acronyms. In many cases, acronyms completely replace the original expressions because they are easier to pronounce and remember. Research on acronyms suggests that a particularly characteristic feature of acronyms is the presence of mutually related abbreviations, with the related elements being generated simultaneously with the acronyms themselves. Consequently, the question of how the elements of acronyms combine to form a coherent whole assumes particular significance.

In scientific and technical contexts, shortenings, particularly acronyms, help reduce the repetition of lengthy and specialized terms. For example, in fields such as medicine and biology, shortenings like *DNA*, *MRI*, and *COVID* are widely used today. These shortened forms allow specialists to communicate quickly and accurately without repeatedly stating the full terminology. Over time, many of these shortenings become standardized and are even understood by non-specialists. In the field of education, there is also an important group of shortenings. Terms such as *IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)* are now widely used by both students and teachers. These shortenings simplify complex academic concepts and make communication more efficient.

Acronyms also play a prominent role in political and international discussions. Organizations such as *NATO*, *UNESCO*, and *UNICEF* are typically referred to by their acronyms rather than their full names. In many cases, speakers are not even aware of the original expanded forms, which illustrates how shortenings can function as independent lexical units within the language. This process of lexicalization demonstrates the full integration of shortenings into the linguistic system (Plag, 2003, pp. 125-128).

In recognition of her contributions to the preservation, study, and research of Azerbaijan's rich cultural heritage, M. Aliyeva was appointed in September 2004 as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador in the field of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Musical Traditions (UNESCO Azerbaijan, n.d.).

In contemporary everyday communication, acronyms have experienced a remarkable expansion, propelled largely by the advent of digital media and the internet. Social networking platforms, online forums, and gaming communities increasingly rely on shortened forms to facilitate swift and efficient interaction. Expressions such as *LOL (Laughing Out Loud), OMG (Oh My God), and FYI (For Your Information)* have transcended their digital origins, permeating spoken language and informal written discourse. Beyond merely conveying information, certain acronyms carry emotional or pragmatic nuances, signaling attitudes, reactions, and subtle social cues.

When discussing the development of a language's vocabulary and the role of shortenings, abbreviations, acronyms in everyday communication, it is also appropriate to emphasize the "Internet language." Today, the characteristics that emerge at the intersection of literary, official language and jargon in online communication, as well as the reasons behind the creation of Internet shortenings, abbreviations, are examined. Particular attention is paid to the influence of speech culture rules and principles, especially those governing the economy of expression in language use. Lexical items such as *ava*, *mult*, and *mod*, which belong to the jargon of closed groups, are encountered, along with shortenings, acronyms like *inst*, *ekz*, and *norm*, created primarily for reasons of linguistic economy and based on written forms. Some of these units have emerged through the transliteration of corresponding English words, while others are derived even from transliterated English Internet terms (for example, *comments* from *comment*; *I's ignored* from the verb *to ignore*) (Molodoy uchenyy, n.d.).

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It is commonly observed that abbreviations and acronyms are widely used in the English-speaking virtual space. Nowadays, social networks are used not only for communication but also for conducting surveys and research, as well as for tracking news. Many acronyms that emerge online also appear frequently in both written and spoken forms of English. In studies on Internet language, lists of English abbreviations and acronyms used in the Azerbaijani-language Internet, as well as their corresponding Azerbaijani-language equivalents (*the expressions most frequently used by our students)*, have been presented, such as:

LOL – Laughing Out Loud (Yüksək səslə gülmək), IDK – I Don't Know (Bilmirəm),

IOW - in other words (başqa sözlə), OMG – Oh My God (Ay Allahım!), TBH – To Be Honest (Düzünü desəm), TMI – Too Much Information (Çox, ətraflı məlumat)

It has been observed that, depending on the knowledge level of users and participants, acronyms are widely employed in discussions on forums and online platforms. These shortenings serve as concise forms of both formal scientific terms and everyday jargon, facilitating the rapid and efficient transmission of information. At the same time, their usage reflects the extent to which participants are familiar with the topic and also functions as a marker of social identification. Consequently, internet language creates a rich textual environment that emerges from the interaction between standard and non-standard languages, styles, as well as formal and informal expressions. One of the other important factors contributing to the emergence of shortenings, clippings as a productive word-formation method in virtual communication is the limited number of characters on social networking platforms. In her article *"Abbreviation in the Language of Internet Forums",* Y. M. Kuvshinskaya notes that many shortenings, abbreviations, particularly those related to school and student contexts, are derived from conventional shortenings used in educational documentation. For example*:* ***зач., незач., удовл., проф., препод., р. я., лит-ра, физ-ра.*** Based on the same patterns, online communication also generates new abbreviations that are not employed in the written language of official documents, such as инст., учит-ца, and others. Some abbreviations are characteristic of spoken language, for example: ***гос, препод, физра, мульт, ава, ветакадемия, вет.*** and so on. However, there are also fixed abbreviations that clearly originate from and function within written language and are difficult to pronounce; these include those mentioned above: ***удовл., инст., х. г., фш, 2М война*** and others (Molodoy uchenyy, n.d.). Thus, it can be concluded that the potential nature of Internet shortenings, clippings becomes particularly evident when their creation and use on forums intensify around specific topics. In such cases, participants readily form new shortenings - abbreviations and acronyms from words and expressions denoting key and frequently repeated concepts related to the topic. Consequently, the specialized shortenings – abbreviations and acronyms used on forums exhibit considerable diversity in both their origin and functional scope.

Based on the material examined in this study, we identified several functions of using shortenings, acronyms: compressive, cognitive, regulative, and expressive functions. We aimed to provide a detailed analysis of these functions, as well as their realization through examples.

During the analysis of acronyms, shortenings it was observed that the ***expressive function*** occupies a particularly prominent place among the other functions. This function serves to convey the speaker's emotional state, as well as their subjective attitude toward objects and real-world events. This prominence is explained by the fact that social media users place great importance on expressing both their opinions and their emotions. Let us now consider examples in which the expressive function is manifested:

OMG -Oh my God LUSM – love you so much JMO -just my opinion

The ***compressive function*** is prominently reflected in internet language through the use of acronyms and abbreviations. This function is essential in online communication, as it enables the efficient utilization of linguistic resources while accommodating the rapid pace and immediacy of digital interactions. By employing various types of shortenings (acronyms and abbreviations) the compressive function condenses information, allowing textual content to be conveyed in a compact, concise, and highly economical manner:

VIP - very important person, PC – personal computer, doc – document

The third function of shortenings (acronyms and abbreviations) in internet language is the ***cognitive function***, also referred to as the informative function. This function demonstrates that acronyms and abbreviations convey additional information not present in standard notations, thereby providing supplementary knowledge about the world. It occurs infrequently, as users typically employ abbreviations and acronyms that do not require the recipient to possess prior background knowledge to understand the content. For example, *DM (Direct Message), YOLO (You Only Live Once), FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), YMS (You are My Soul)* and so on.

The ultimate function is identified as the ***regulative function***. This function occurs relatively infrequently and primarily serves to regulate the relationships between participants in interactive communication. Through this function, participants can prompt one another to take action, offer recommendations, or critique behavior. The regulative function is realized through performative verbs, functioning as commands, directives, or instructions.*For example*,*GTG (Got to go), KISS (keep it short and simple), PLS (Please), CM (call me)*

The use of abbreviations and acronyms allows texts to be significantly shortened, thereby enabling users to address the topic raised in their posts more comprehensively. Let us examine several instances of literary, official, and figurative forms of language that have emerged as jargon in the everyday speech of athletes and coaches in the field of sports: *FIFA – (International Federation of Association Football), IOC – (International Olympic Committee), NBA – (National Basketball Association), NFL – (National Football League), PR –(Personal Record), WOD – (Workout of the Day), RM – (Repetition Maximum).*

The conditions of communication encourage users to receive and transmit information as quickly as possible; consequently, one of the main characteristics of this language is the tendency to simplify, minimize, and standardize its expressive means. An interesting and previously uncommon innovation in languages is the formation of complex abbreviated words in which a word is replaced by a letter or number that sounds identical. This practice is widely used in English (e.g., IOU = I owe you) and, as can be observed, it is gradually extending beyond the confines of computer jargon to integrate into various other languages (Vinogradova, n.d.).

According to V. V. Borisov, acronyms have formed as a distinctive linguistic response to the unprecedented growth in the volume of information, the emergence of numerous terms as a result of the scientific and technological revolution, and the extensive use of mass information and communication media (Borisov, 1972, p. 10). Thus, increasing attention has been directed toward the issue of shortenings, particularly acronyms—which constitute one of the key features in the formation of many new words. This phenomenon illustrates that once acronyms are fully assimilated into a linguistic community, they function seamlessly as ordinary lexical items. In practical terms, shortenings or clippings serve multiple purposes: they streamline technical jargon, enhance brevity, and generate memorable linguistic markers. However, when their meanings remain opaque to some users, acronyms can inadvertently create exclusivity, rendering context indispensable for comprehension. The interplay between communicative efficiency and clarity thus underscores the role of acronyms as a dynamic and integral feature of modern English, reflecting both the adaptability and creativity inherent in contemporary language practices.

According to I.V.Arnold, acronyms present a special interest because they exemplify the working of the lexical adaptive system. In meeting the needs of communication and fulfilling the laws of information theory requiring a maximum signal in the minimum time the lexical system undergoes modification in its basic structure: namely it forms new elements not by combining existing morphemes and proceeding from sound forms to their graphic representation but the other way round — coining new words from the initial letters of phrasal terms originating in texts (Arnold, 1986, p. 143). From a broader perspective, the widespread use of acronyms in everyday language reflects the dynamic nature of linguistic practice. They enable orators and writers to communicate efficiently, foster group identity, and incorporate complex concepts into daily vocabulary. Their prevalence indicates that acronyms serve not only as practical tools but also as markers of cultural and linguistic innovation.

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In this article, we seek to provide an overview of the abbreviations and acronyms used in student discourse, sports fan communication, medical and political discourse, communication among hobby enthusiasts, interest-based communities as well as interactions related to user representation in online environments such as forums, chats, and social networks. By examining the definitions, structures, and functions of clippings or shortenings, abbreviations, it becomes evident that word shortening does not signify a linguistic decline; rather, it reflects the natural and efficient evolution of language. The shortening of words constitutes a fundamental linguistic process that mirrors the dynamic nature of language. Through shortenings, clippings, acronyms, and text-based conventions, speakers adapt communication to their needs and contextual demands. Although often associated with informality, word shortening also plays a significant role in formal, academic, and professional contexts.

In the article "Lexicalization of Abbreviations in English", Yamina Bennane states: According to Affeish (2010), the signification of the acronym must pass through the intermediary of its source. This makes the acronym dependent to its full form signification and so lacking the property of being a linguistic sign. However, knowing the source is not a necessary step to know what an acronym means" (Bennane, n.d.). Language constantly evolves in response to the needs of society and parallel technological developments.

Conclusion

In contemporary communication environments, particularly through email, social media, and other digital platforms, interactions have accelerated and acquired a more functional form. In this context, shortened, abbreviated forms of language have not only been incorporated into its structural system but have also become a means to enhance communicative efficiency and practicality. Considering this adaptive characteristic of language, abbreviations and acronyms should not be viewed solely as negative, harmful or undesirable; their functional and creative potential must also be recognized and evaluated. Rather than being perceived as erroneous or detrimental, shortened language should be understood as an efficient and creative response to evolving communicative demands. As technology and society continue to advance, the shortening of words will remain a vital and productive component of language development.

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