

“I’m Just Another Jaffy”: The Limits of Linguistic Reappropriation

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1 “I’m Just Another Jaffy”

Language is not merely a form of communication, but also a method of constructing and revealing identity within social frameworks (Meyerhoff, 2011). Hence, when the social meaning of words change, this can lead to a change in attitudes about groups and individuals, and can modify peoples’ sense of identity (Darvin, 2016). This is particularly evident with category terms, the meanings of which are predominantly constructed through discourse (McNamara, 2019). A further understanding of language change and linguistic re-appropriation with relation to category terms could enable insight into how individual and group identities are constructed within certain “communities of practice”—groups of people who share a mutual social engagement (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992). The current study will focus specifically on the category label *jaffy* (i.e. “just another fucking first year”) and its developing social meaning and lexicalisation as used in the online Facebook community of practice “Unimelb Love Letters” (UMLL) between 2018 and 2020. I will further examine whether *jaffy* could be considered a subject of linguistic re-appropriation, and if not, how the limits of linguistic re-appropriation could be further defined to clarify the research in this domain.

The term *jaffy* can be traced back to at least 2010 (Urban Dictionary, 2010): “Jaffy stands for “*Just a Fucking First Year*” and is used at some universities by second year and above years to describe the latest intake. More often used by people who [live]...on residence.”

In 2013 the term was further defined by the Monash Student Association (note the change from “a” to “another”):

“An Australian term used to describe first year students, particularly the overly enthusiastic type that irritates the older, seasoned and cynical second and third years. It stands for *just another fucking first year*” (Maddy, 2013).

The meaning of lexemes is informed by both (i) the patterned association of the word with specific language choices and contexts, and (ii) the form of the lexeme itself. Therefore, if either

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of these aspects change, a semantic shift can occur (i.e. changes in the meaning of a word from its original meaning) (Meyerhoff, 2011). For example, the acronym “LOL” shows a semantic shift, from the overt marker of laughter, “laugh out loud”, towards an indication of positive valence (Baron & Ling, 2011) and empathy (McWhorter, 2013). This example demonstrates lexicalisation, where the acronym loses its full meaning, and gains new semantic and pragmatic characteristics (Bennane, 2017). Lyons (1977) suggests that a semantic relation between an acronym and its full form may be lost in such a way that the acronym gains a positive or negative connotation, while its full form maintains neutrality. This may suggest that acronyms, through the process of lexicalisation, undergo a semantic shift. I propose that the term *jaffy* is such an acronym.

The process of a semantic shift could be viewed as a foundation of “linguistic re-appropriation”—a group reclaiming terms that were previously used by others to negatively identify that group (Galinsky et al., 2003). Galinsky et al. (2003, p. 223) suggests that re-appropriation is only possible due to the “contextually sensitive” nature of labels. Their 2003 study focuses on stigma, which Crocker et al. (1998, p. 505) define as “some attribute, or characteristic” that imbues a “social identity” that is deemed negative in “a particular social context”. Linguistic re-appropriation is often enacted to combat this enforced negative identity, through manipulating the connotation of the stigmatizing label to neutralise its power to harm (Galinsky et al., 2003).

As a result of linguistic re-appropriation, a greater sense of “in-group affiliation and cohesion”, and therefore identity, can ensue (Galinsky et al., 2003, p. 234). Galinsky et al. (2013) conducted a study requiring 73 undergraduate participants to list a social group with which they identified, and to provide a stigmatizing label that has been used to refer to that group. Participants were asked to remember times that they referred to themselves with this stigmatizing label, and times when the label was used “against them” (Galinsky et al., 2013, p. 2023). Results showed that when the label was used to self-identify, the participants felt more powerful than when it was used by others to identify them. The study similarly examined whether linguistic re-appropriation is “limited to stigmatizing labels”, through examining the effect of the stigmatizing label “queer” in comparison to equivalent non-stigmatizing labels such as “lesbian” (Galinsky et al., 2013, p. 2026). Findings showed that self-identifying vs other-identifying did not significantly “affect the evaluations of the nonstigmatizing... label” (Galinsky et al., 2013, p. 2027). In the current study, I posit that *jaffy*’s full form, “just another fucking first year”, connotes a negative relation to first year students. Hence, I suggest that *jaffy* may be a subject of re-appropriation.

The current study aims to examine how the form and social meaning of the term *jaffy* has developed over time, in reference to the self and the other. Furthermore, the study aims to determine whether *jaffy* is a subject of linguistic re-appropriation. Firstly, it is hypothesised that the term *jaffy*, as used on UMLL, will have undergone lexicalisation from 2018 to 2020. Secondly, in relation to social meaning and the theory of linguistic re-appropriation, I hypothesise that (i) the use of *jaffy* to refer to the self will have become more frequent from 2018 to 2020 on UMLL, (ii) the use of *jaffy* to refer to the self will have become less negatively connotated from 2018 to 2020 on UMLL, and (iii) the general use of *jaffy* will have become less negatively connotated from 2018 to 2020 on UMLL.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Participants included University of Melbourne students who anonymously posted on the Facebook page UMLL between April 9th 2018 and October 13th 2020.

2.2 Data Collection

A total of 2358 posts out of 24,486 were gathered from UMLL using a web scrape on October 13th 2020. Data from each post included the text, date and post number. Of these posts, 29 included the term *jaffy*. Following this process, a manual scrape was conducted by searching for the term *jaffy* on the Facebook page and filtering by year. This process extracted an extra 102 posts, of which some included more than one token of the term *jaffy*. A total of 143 tokens of *jaffy* were gathered from 131 anonymous text posts.

2.3 Data Processing

The researcher coded each instance of *jaffy* according to the following coding categories:

Capitalisation	Example
All letters are lowercase	“ <i>jaffy</i> ”
All letters are capital	“ <i>JAFFY</i> ”
The initial letter is capital	“ <i>Jaffy</i> ”

Syntactic Context of Use ^a	Example
Det__	“Unfortunately, he’s a <i>jaffy</i> ” “To the <i>jaffy</i> who sat in a third year Chemistry: Reactivity and Mechanism tute” “Please help this <i>jaffy</i> out and educate me” “da Jaffies”
ADJ__	“A terrified <i>jaffy</i> ”
Just another/Just a/Only a__	“I was just a <i>jaffy</i> ” “I’m just another <i>jaffy</i> ” “Remember he’s only a <i>jaffy</i> ”
__Noun	“ <i>Jaffy</i> vibe”
__ + Subordinate Clause	“A <i>jaffy</i> that has only been on campus for 1 week”
Acronym (where the syntactic context aligns with the use of <i>jaffy</i> as an acronym)	“ <i>JAFFY</i> here”
Plural	“my fellow <i>jaffys</i> ”
Verb__	“...who aren’t <i>jaffy</i> ’s” “Look at all these second year’s shitting on jaffies”

<i>Jaffy</i> by itself/ __ (often used when listing attributes)	“- <i>jaffy</i> ”
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Note: ^aAnalysis includes cross-over between categories for individual tokens.

Lexical Category	Example
Noun	“I’m a science <i>jaffy</i> that is looking for some love”
Adjective	“Do I just happen to have a <i>jaffy</i> fetish..”

Spelling Variants	Example
Jaffy	“A frustrated <i>jaffy</i> ”
Jaffie	“A shy <i>jaffie</i> ”
Jaffies	“Not going to parties with da <i>Jaffies</i> ”
Jaffys	“To all my fellow <i>jaffys</i> ”
Jaffy’s	“We wont be able to tell the <i>jaffy</i> ’s from the third years”

Semester of Publication	Date Range
Semester 1	9th April 2018 – 30th June 2018
Semester 2	1st July 2018 – 31st December 2018
Semester 3	1st January 2019 – 30th June 2019
Semester 4	1st July 2019 – 31st December 2019
Semester 5	1st January 2020 – 30th June 2020
Semester 6	1st July 2020– 13th October 2020

The 143 tokens of *jaffy* were further coded in relation to self/other identification and negative/neutral/positive connotation:

Identification	Example
Self: tokens of <i>jaffy</i> that refer to the self.	“I’m a self-conscious, skinny <i>jaffy</i> ..”
Other: tokens of <i>jaffy</i> that don’t refer to the self.	“Her baby face could mistake her as a <i>Jaffy</i> ” “WHAT THE HECK IS A <i>JAFFY</i> !?!?”

Connotation	Example
Negative: posts that present the term <i>jaffy</i> in a negative manner by relating it to negatively connotated terms.	“Just another <i>jaffy</i> having a crisis” “A desperate <i>jaffy</i> ”
Neutral: posts that present the term <i>jaffy</i> in neither a positive nor negative light.	“A mature age <i>Jaffy</i> ” “A <i>jaffy</i> here”
Positive: posts that present the term <i>jaffy</i> in a positive manner, by relating it to positive terms.	“A hopeful <i>jaffy</i> ” “A very content <i>jaffy</i> with a better designed science hoodie”

A second person coded 20% of the tokens of *jaffy* for identification and connotation. Cohen’s K was conducted to determine inter-rater reliability, demonstrating perfect agreement for identification ($K = 1.0$) and moderate agreement for connotation ($K = 0.773$) (Landis & Koch, 1977).

3 Results

An analysis of the syntactic context in which *jaffy* was used on UMLL from semester 1 to 6 is shown in Figure 1. Furthermore, the proportion of posts using the lowercase form (i.e. *jaffy*), the initial letter capitalised form (i.e. *Jaffy*) and the fully capitalised form (i.e. *JAFFY*) from Semester 1 to 6 is shown in Figure 2. An analysis of the developing orthography of *jaffy* over time was similarly conducted (Figure 3). The lexical category of *jaffy* was categorised into noun or adjective, and its development over time was plotted (Figure 4). Finally, the frequency of the use of *jaffy* to refer to the self in comparison to its use to refer to others from Semester 1 to Semester 6 is shown in Figure 5.

A multinomial logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict the connotation of tokens of *jaffy* based on identification and semester (Table 1). Findings were non-significant. However, the odds ratio (OR) indicates that as identification increases from other to self, the odds of a token of *jaffy* being neutral in connotation as opposed to negative increases by 32%. Similarly, as identification increases from other to self, the odds of a token of *jaffy* being positive in connotation as opposed to negative increases by 63%.

In relation to semester, the data suggests that for each unit by which the semester of publication increases, the odds of a post being neutral in connotation compared to negative decreases by 6%, and the odds of a post being positive in connotation compared to negative increases by 14%.

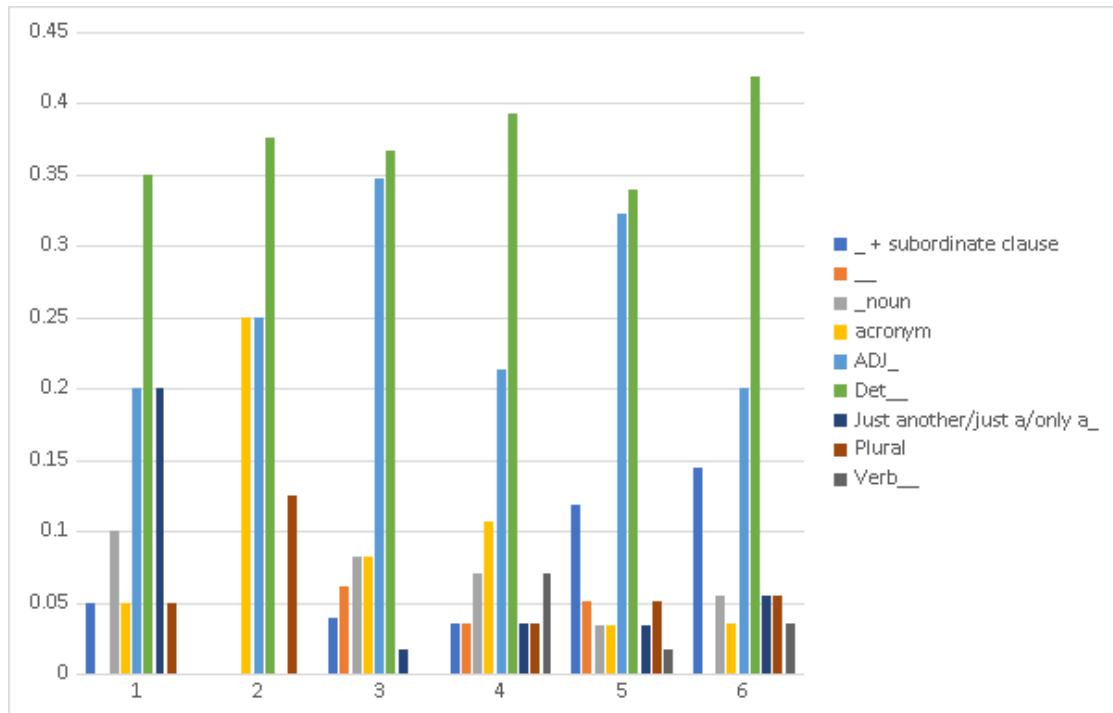


Figure 1: The Contexts in Which the Term Jaffy was Used from Semester 1 to Semester 6.
 Note: “__” = jaffy

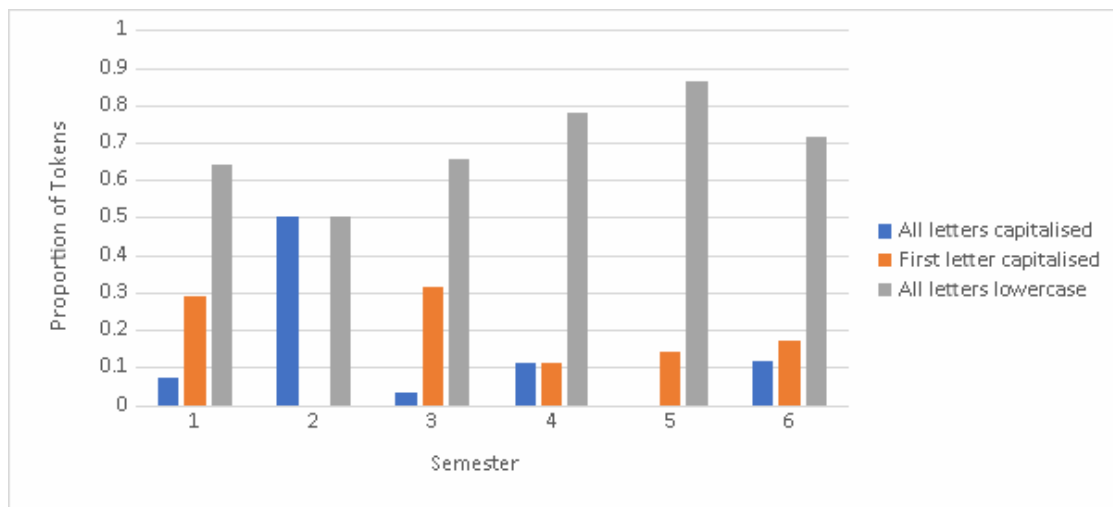


Figure 2: The Capitalisation of the Term Jaffy from Semester 1 to Semester 2.

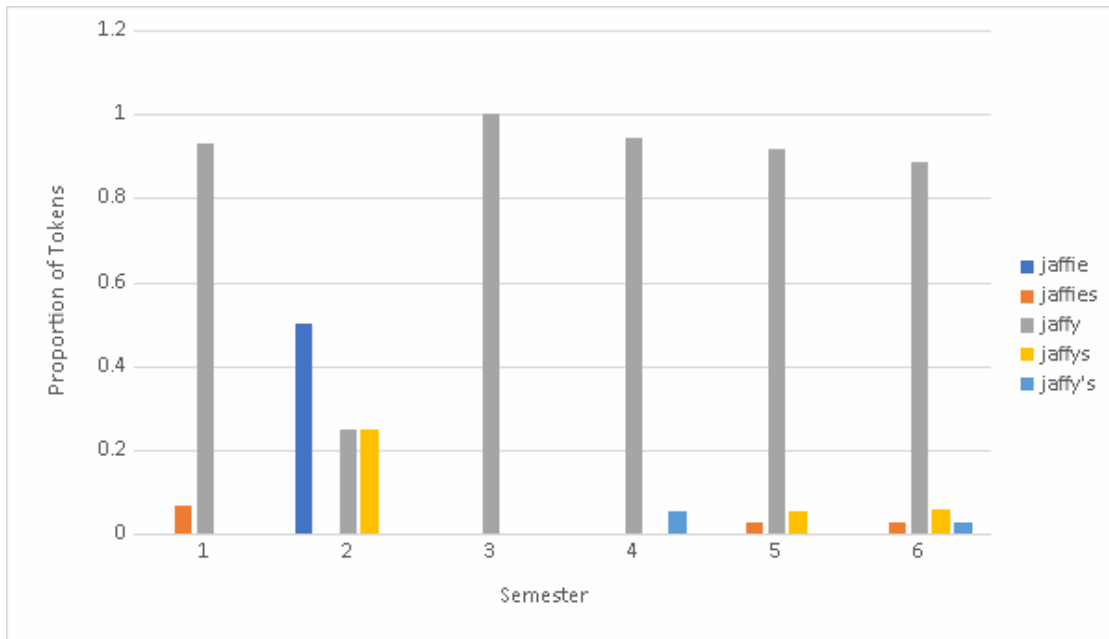


Figure 3: The Orthography of the Term Jaffy from Semester 1 to Semester 6.

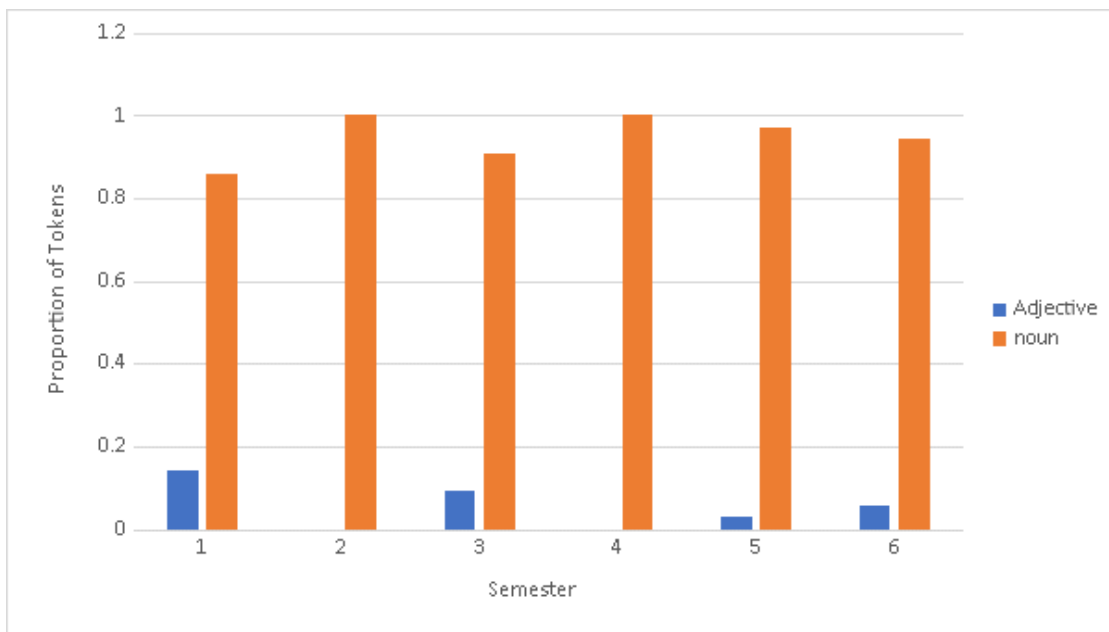


Figure 4: The Lexical Category of the Term Jaffy from Semester 1 to Semester 6.

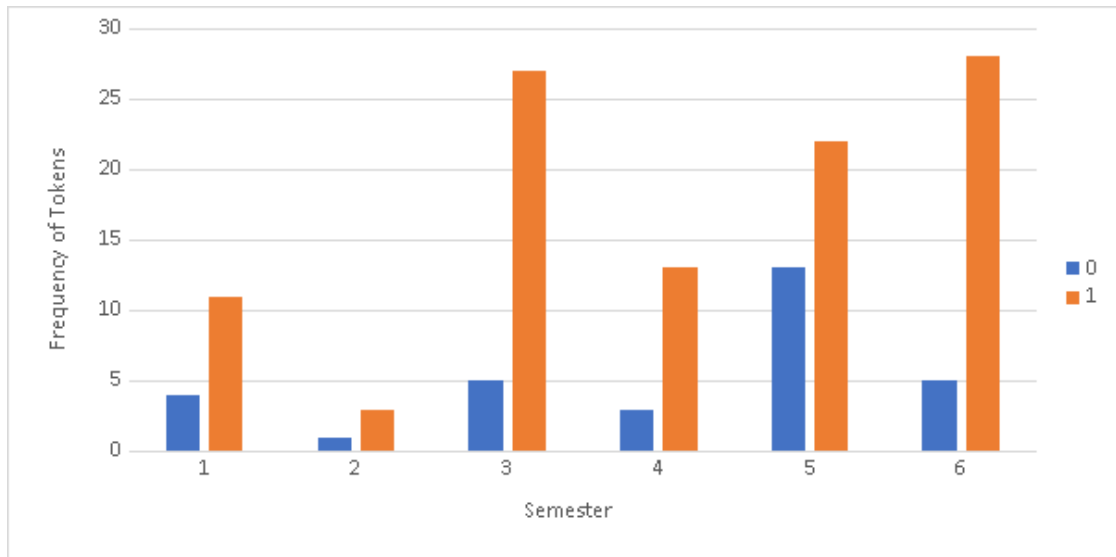


Figure 5: The Frequency of Use of *Jaffy* to Refer to the Self vs. Others from Semester 1 to Sem 6. Note: 0 = Other, 1 = Self

Connotation ^a		b	se	χ^2	df	p	E β
Neutral connotation	Intercept	.678	.510	1.762	1	.184	-
	Identification	.280	.410	.468	1	.494	1.323
	Semester	-.064	.113	.322	1	.570	.938
Positive connotation	Intercept	-2.339	1.164	4.039	1	.044	-
	Identification	.487	.781	.389	1	.533	1.627
	Semester	.108	.244	.196	1	.658	1.114

Table 1: Multinomial Logistic Regression Analysis of the Connotation of *Jaffy* with Reference to Identification and Semester.

Note.^aReference category is negative connotation (1).

3.1 Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyse how the meaning and form of the term *jaffy* has developed from 2018 to 2020, and to examine whether *jaffy* could be considered a subject of linguistic re-appropriation.

The hypothesis that the term *jaffy* has undergone lexicalisation was predominantly supported by our results. Figure 2 shows that the proportion of tokens of *jaffy* with full capitalisation (i.e. *JAFFY*) has decreased over time, whilst lowercase tokens of *jaffy* have increased. This demonstrates a shift from *jaffy* being used as an acronym, and towards it being used as a lexeme. This is further supported by Figure 1, which shows that the use of *jaffy* in syntactic contexts aligning with its use as an acronym decreased slightly following Semester 2.

Moreover, Figure 1 demonstrates that the proportion of tokens of *jaffy* following a determiner increased from Semester 1 to Semester 6. Syntactically, this implies that the full form is

increasingly being disregarded in the use of *jaffy*, given that it already includes a determiner (i.e. “another”). This is suggested to be an aspect of lexicalisation by Brinton and Traugott (2005, p. 144), who state that with the “loss of internal constituency” an acronym “may become more lexical”. Similarly, it is suggested that acronyms that have undergone lexicalisation become “ambiguous with regard to [their] internal structure” (Bennane, 2017, p. 158). Interestingly, the use of *jaffy* following “just another” etc. showed its peak in Semester 1 and dropped to around 5% of tokens or less thereafter. This may further elucidate how the meaning of *jaffy* has become separated from its full form.

These findings regarding the lexicalisation of *jaffy* are similar to the analysis of “LOL” and its semantic shift (Baron & Ling, 2011; McWhorter, 2013; Yudytska, 2018). In a comparative manner, *jaffy* has appeared to diverge from its full meaning of “just another fucking first year” and instead towards being an identity marker of first year students at the University of Melbourne, with the capacity to indicate neutral, positive and negative connotations depending on the context in which it is used.

In relation to linguistic re-appropriation, our results supported the hypothesis that the use of *jaffy* to refer to the self has become more frequent than the use of *jaffy* to refer to others. This is evident in Figure 5, which outlines that the frequency of tokens of *jaffy* referring to the self within a semester increased from approximately 11 to 27 between Semester 1 and Semester 6. In comparison, the use of *jaffy* to refer to others remained relatively low at around 5 tokens or less per semester, except for the outlier Semester 5, which produced approximately 13 tokens of *jaffy* referring to others.

However, I found no significant results to support the hypothesis that the use of *jaffy* to refer to the self has become less negatively connotated from 2018 to 2020. Nevertheless, the results did suggest a trend towards *jaffy* being more neutral and positive compared to negative when it was used to self-identify as opposed to identifying others.

Finally, results were not significant in relation to the hypothesis that the use of *jaffy* has become, in general, less negatively connotated from 2018 to 2020. However, the results show that there is trend towards a more positive connotation of *jaffy* as the semester of publication increases. That said, the logistic regression analysis indicated lower odds of a token of *jaffy* being neutral in connotation as opposed to negative as the semester of publication increased.

The results of the current study extend the findings by Galinsky et al. (2013), through further outlining the limits of linguistic re-appropriation. Although Galinsky et al. demonstrated that the perception of nonstigmatizing terms does not differ between self and other identification, they did not outline the minimum level of stigma required for a term to be re-appropriated in a manner that neutralises the term. It is possible that *jaffy* was not found to be neutralised through linguistic re-appropriation because it did not originally meet the threshold for stigmatization. Hence, the current study may show that in order for a term to be neutralised through re-appropriation, it must originally connote a higher level of negativity towards the group it is labelling than *jaffy* did in 2018.

However, we cannot conclusively assume that *jaffy* is not a subject of linguistic re-appropriation, as the current study was limited by its sample size and the time period analysed. The 143 tokens of *jaffy* demonstrated a small sample size per semester, making it difficult for significant inferences relating to the change of connotation over time to be made. Furthermore, given

that *jaffy* was coined in 2010, if not earlier, the period of use of the term on UMLL forms a small proportion of its total lifespan. Hence, this study cannot examine the total evolution of the term *jaffy*, meaning that our understanding of the greater trend relating to its change in meaning and form is minimal. Nevertheless, the current study had the asset of focusing on a specific community of practice (UMLL), which allows for a strong understanding of how this community of practice has informed the meaning and form of *jaffy* from the time the community was initiated. The findings relating to the use of *jaffy* on UMLL could therefore be compared to other communities of practice, such as the Facebook page “Monash Love Letter” to examine whether there are differences in the way the term has developed over time between communities of practice.

Therefore, future research could conduct a broader analysis of the use of *jaffy* across various communities of practice in Melbourne, such as other Melbourne university Facebook pages, the University of Melbourne subreddit (i.e. /r/unimelb) and within synchronous online communication of university students. If earlier examples of *jaffy* could be gathered, this would provide a better reference point for comparison with the current social meaning and form of *jaffy*, and may uncover the greater evolution of re-appropriation from the time the term was coined.

Future research could also examine the limit of linguistic re-appropriation, through an analysis of the varying levels of stigmatising terms and how the perception of power may differ when these terms are used to refer to the self or to refer to others. This could delineate the point at which terms carry enough stigma to be neutralised through re-appropriation. Such research would have important implications for our understanding of how groups construct and protect their identities, and how harmful language can be stripped of its power to hurt others through sociolinguistic processes.

Ultimately, the term *jaffy*, as used on UMLL, has undergone lexicalisation over the period of 2018 to 2020. In this manner, the meaning of the term has diverged from its original base phrase, and towards a marker of identity that is imbued with social meaning through its context of use rather than its full form. Furthermore, the study provides greater insight into the potential limits of linguistic re-appropriation and may act as a foundation for further research into the role of stigma in both linguistic and more general re-appropriation. That said, we cannot conclusively state that *jaffy* has not undergone re-appropriation, and therefore, greater research on this term, with a larger time period and sample size is required.

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