Lexical Blends in Political Discourse

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Abstract

The paper is based on the theoretical framework of defining lexical blends within other word-formation processes combining clippings and compounds and followed by suggested classifications by various linguists. It highlights playfulness and creativity in language that make blends stand out, especially in journalistic texts, thus making them memorable. The theoretical part is illustrated with examples from political discourse as reflected in English-language media. Concluding remarks are devoted to blends coined in the Slovak language.

Keywords: lexical blends, portmanteau words, political discourse, abbreviation, composition, word formation.

Introduction

Lexical blending, though a minor word-formation process, has attracted interest from linguists, journalists, and language users due to its linguistic inventiveness and playfulness. Due to abbreviation of source words and consequent compounding of splinters, encoding and decoding blends can be perceived as a 'language game' between a sender and a recipient. With the rising popularity of new media, blends gain frequency, especially in digitally mediated communication thanks to their ludic character and are found in different registers, with political discourse being no exception.

Stemming from attempts to define and classify blends the paper aims to highlight this type of new word formations used in political discourse in English, followed by final notes dealing with blends in Slovak. It highlights how nonce words can become neologisms and even archaisms illustrating these processes with blends frequently occurring in texts concerning politics. Special attention is paid to blends formed from proper names, where satire and irony prevail over playfulness, and how some splinters can become bound morphemes based on their productivity.

Definitions of blends

Many terms refer to lexical blends, such as *amalgams*, *'coalesced words'*, *'brunch-words', 'telescope(d) words',* and *'portmanteau words'* (Mattiello 2013)*.* The listed terms have different motivations – *amalgams* and *telescope words* pertain to the word-formation processes, the latter being based on a metaphor, the term *brunch words* comprises one of the best-known blends *brunch (breakfast + lunch),* and *portmanteau words* is a term coined by Lewis Carroll in his book *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), where Humpty Dumpty explained to Alice the nonsense words used in the poem *Jabberwocky* by saying*:* "Well, 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word" (Carroll 1872: 126-127), which is not scientifically precise of course, but it captures the essence of the linguistic phenomenon of blends. Even more so, that coming from a children's book, it encompasses the fact that blends are often the result of creativity in language and wordplay.

Although blending is not a new phenomenon in English, e.g. Wiclif in the 14th century used *austern (austere + stern)* (Pound 1913), Shakespeare was the author, rebuse (rebuke + abuse) (Cannon 1986) and Greene in the 16th century introduced *foolosophy (fool + philosophy)* (Adams 2013), their exact definition is absent.

Already in 1913, Louise Pound said that blending is "a mode of word-formation, the telescoping of two or more words into one, as it were, or the superposition of one word upon another" (Pound 1913: 324). Seventy years later, Laurie Bauer labelled blends unpredictable formations and defined a blend as "a new lexeme formed from parts of two (or possibly more) other words in such a way that there is no transparent analysis into morphs" (Bauer 1983: 234). Roswitha Fischer (1998: 34) considers blends to be those "which consist of incomplete word elements from two pre-existing words."

Ingo Plag claims that the formation of blends "is best described in terms of prosodic categories" (Plag 2003: 121) and categorises blending as a non-concatenative process. His characterization of these lexical units is based on a comparison with truncations. He says that, unlike clipping, blending "involves two or (rarely) more base words (instead of only one), but shares with truncations a considerable loss of phonetic (or orthographic) material" (ibid.). However, it is difficult to agree with Plag about adding acronyms to blends based on orthography, e.g. NATO, UNESCO (Plag 2003: 13).

According to Stefan Gries "blending involves the coinage of a new lexeme by fusing parts of at least two other source words of which either one is

shortened in the fusion and/or where there is some form of phonemic or graphemic overlap of the source words" (Gries 2004: 639).

Ada Böhmerová defines blending comprehensively as "a process of simultaneous joining, reduction and amalgamation of the matrices of the bases within the selected combinatory possibilities of the joint matrix and the boundaries of the (relative) recognizability of the residues of the motivating bases of the new naming unit" (Böhmerová 2010: 64).

Elisa Mattiello considers blending "as an extra-grammatical phenomenon" (Mattiello 2013: 112) belonging to extra-grammatical morphology. In Mattiello's words "[b]lends are obtained by fusing parts of at least two source words, at least one of which is curtailed and/or there is a graphemic/phonemic overlap between them" (Mattiello 2013: 6).

Vincent Renner (2018: 122) chooses to apply a prototypical approach to blends taking their traits as typicality features, not as defining features.

Based on the above-mentioned definitions and characterisations, the following four points can be considered as the basic conditions for determining lexical blends:

(1) a blend consists of at least two source lexemes,
(2) at least one of the source lexemes is truncated,
(3) morphemic boundaries of truncations are (usually) not marked,
(4) there is a phonologic or graphic overlap of individual constituents of a blend.

The first two conditions point to the fact that blending is a borderline word-formation process that combines abbreviation and composition. Although a blend consists of at least two source lexemes, it is distinguished from a clipped compound in formal and semantic terms (Mattiello 2021). A blend is not a linear combination of two words into a single new word, as in *chequebook, greenhouse, underestimate*, etc., but it represents a fusion of two fragmentary components. Stemming from this, lexemes such as *adland (advertising + land), agribusiness (agriculture + business), Europarliament (European + parliament[1]), pixel (picture element), postcode (postal code), Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity), workaholic (work + alcoholic)* are compounds, although at least one of the bases has been clipped, because the morpheme boundaries are obvious, and even the fourth condition for the bases to overlap has not been met. Some linguists, however, classify these words as blends (Algeo 1977, Fischer 1998, Adams 2013).

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[1] Euro- is seen as a prefix (*eurocurrency, eurozone, eurocentric,* etc.), otherwise, an overlapping of the grapheme *-p-* could be registered in the lexeme *Europarliament.*

L. Bauer summarised the pitfalls of defining blends by concluding that "the category of blends is not well-defined, and blending tends to shade off into compounding, neo-classical compounding, affixation, clipping, and… acronyming" (Bauer 1983: 236).

Classification of blends

Similarly to the displayed divergence in the terminology of blends and various views on what blending is, reflected in numerous definitions of it, there are several different classifications of blends.

Stemming from the position of particular blends in a lexicon, nonce formations or occasionalisms are distinguished from neologisms. Pound delimits the former group as "originating probably in a sort of aphasia", e. g. *sweedle* as a result of hesitation between *swindle* and *wheedle* (Pound 1967: 20) and Cannon does not even consider nonce formations to be blends and calls them "slips of the tongue or brain" or speech errors (Cannon 2000 as cited in Mattiello 2013: 118). However, some of the nonce formations may become lexicalised and standardised and thus become blend neologisms (Mattiello 2019).

The majority of classifications focus on the structural analysis of blends. R. Fischer (1998: 35-36) puts blends into three categories[2]:

(1) *endocentric blends*, in which the first source word determines the second, e.g. *feminar (feminine seminar), forex (foreign exchange), Medicare (medical care);*

(2) *dvandva-blends*, in which both source words are equal and thus are semantic coordinatives, e.g. *burkini (burka + bikini), diplonomics (diplomacy + economics), glocal (global + local), guestage (guest + hostage), hesiflation (hesitation + inflation);*

(3) *collocative blends,* where the source words form collocations.

Algeo (1975) calls them *telescopes, portmanteaus,* and *jumbles* respectively.

The classification by I. Fandrych (2008) is based on the type of splinters and overlapping of source words and is almost identical to the categories of blends delimited by D. Lančarič (2008).

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[2] The categories follow the classification by Fischer, the examples are taken from various sources focusing on journalistic and political discourse, e.g. Algeo (1975), Fischer (1998), Maierová (2012).

Table 1: Structural classification of blends

Category	Examples[3]
initial and final splinter with overlap	*affluenza (affluence + influenza), advertorial (advertisement + editorial)*
two initial splinters with overlap	*modem (modulator + demodulator), Amerind (American + Indian)*
two final splinters with overlap	*Kongfrontation (King Kong + confrontation), permatemp (permanent + temporary)*
overlap of full words ('telescope'[4])	*thinspiration (thin + inspiration), gues(s)timate (guess + estimate)*
initial splinter + full word with overlap	*Coca-Colonisation (Coca-Cola + colonisation), flexecutive (flexible + executive)*
final splinter + full word with overlap	*netiquette (internet + etiquette), blog (web + log)*
full word + final splinter with overlap	*adultescent (adult + adolescent), gundamentalist (gun + fundamentalist)*
insertion of one word into the other with overlap	*Clinterngate (Clinton + intern + gate), glocalisation (globalisation + local)*
more than two constituents	*Clinterngate (Clinton + intern + gate)*
graphic blends	*absa-lutely (ABSA + absolutely), AmeriCan (American + Canadian)*

Source: Fandrych 2008: 113

E. Mattiello (2013) classifies blends from three perspectives: morphotactic, morphonological (and graphic), and morphosemantic. Morphotactically she distinguishes *total* blends, "in which all source words are reduced to splinters (Mattiello 2013: 119) and *partial* blends, "in which only one source word is reduced" (Mattiello 2013: 120). Morphonologically she differentiates between *overlapping* and *non-overlapping* blends. From a morphosemantic perspective *attributive* and *coordinative* blends are identified (Mattiello 2013, 2021). The morphotactic and morphonological classification correlate with the categorisations proposed by Fandrych (2008) and Lančarič (2008), who, however, did not include non-overlapping words in the category of blends. The morphosemantic division is parallel to the clas-

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[3] The first example in every category is adapted from Fandrych (2008), the second one was taken from other sources.

[4] 'Telescope' is used by Fandrych (2008) in a different meaning from Algeo's (1975).

sification by Fischer (1998), where attributive blends correspond to endocentric blends and coordinative to dvandva blends.

It follows from the overview of different classifications that "[c]urrently, there is no unified set of defining criteria for blends, only defeasible constraints, distinguishing prototypical from non-canonical forms" (Mattiello 2021: 7).

Blends in political discourse

This part of the paper aims at disclosing the reasons behind the rising popularity of blends in various registers, focusing on political and journalistic discourse specifically.

Lexical blends are neologisms, i.e. newly coined words, whose emergence is driven by changes in society and the need to name new concepts. A nonce word becomes a neologism when it is adopted by a wider speech community or in other words when it has undergone the process of lexicalisation and standardisation. Some neologisms become part of standardised vocabulary and the novelty feature is not recognised by language users anymore, which was the case of blends such as *smog, modem, motel,* etc. Other neologisms become archaisms, which can be illustrated by the example of the blend *guestage (guest + hostage):* "A foreign national held as a hostage (but called a 'guest') in Iraq or Kuwait during the period following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait" (Tulloch 1991: 337). It is elicited that the lexeme *guestage* was coined by the hostages themselves, but it did not gain support from the media and therefore it "is unlikely to survive in the language" (ibid.), which proved to be the case.

However, there are more aspects of creating blends to be considered. The tendency of English towards economy in language is quoted as one of the reasons for emergence of blends (Böhmerová 2010, Bednárová-Gibová 2014) and abbreviations generally (Fischer 1998, Lančarič 2008, Mattiello 2013). This may be true about abbreviations but blending seems to be contradictory to the principle of least effort.

 Creativity and wordplay in language (Böhmerová 2010, Renner 2015, Lefilliâtre 2019) are mentioned among others. V. Renner (2015) emphasises that lexical blending combines in itself both creativity and playfulness, while in clipping only creativity is present, but playfulness is not. This leads to the conclusion that the concept of wordplay can be applied to lexical blending but not to clipping. The author even states that due to "the wide variety of attested patterns, blending can be claimed to be the most complex form of wordplay in word-formation" (Renner 2015: 121) and decoding a

blend is a form of language game "founded on the ludic exploration of the limits of verbal inventiveness and recognizability" (Renner 2015: 131). Playfulness and wordplay together with irony and satire make blends attractive and memorable, hence they are frequently used in journalistic texts including those referring to the area of politics.

In addition to intralinguistic factors, there are extralinguistic reasons for the emergence of blends. O. Kornienko (2016: 223) says: "Blends often emerge during the periods of active integration of a given society into some new global environment" and the author illustrates how social and economic changes lead to coining new words with examples not only from English but also from Russian, e.g. *дурократы ('idiocrats') = дураки (fools/idiots)+ демократы/бюрократы (democrats/beaurocrats); горбачевизм ('Gorbachevism') = Горбачев (Gorbachev) + капитализм (capitalism); катастройка ('catastroika') = катастрофа (catastrophe) + перестройка (perestroika)* (Kornienko 2016).

The growing influence of popular media culture together with digitally mediated communication is also reflected in the productivity of blending as a word-formation process, because the new media assist the transition of slang into mainstream usage, e.g. *bromance (bro(ther) + romance)* or *frenemy (friend + enemy).*

Blends in political discourse in English

Blending belongs to minor word-formation processes, but due to the above-mentioned reasons, its popularity is on the rise. In this chapter, we deal with productive blends such as *Brexit,* proper names in blends found in political discourse, and splinters that have been undergoing the transition to bound morphemes.

Brexit denotes "the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries 2022). It was coined in 2012 as a "blend of British (or Britain) and exit, probably on the pattern of Grexit (coined earlier in the same year)" (ibid.). Within the decade that followed, the lexeme gave rise to a number of collocations: *no-deal Brexit* (appearing in the 3rd and 4th place respectively in collocations with Brexit in COCA and NOW) *hard Brexit, soft Brexit, clean Brexit, Brexit chaos, Brexit shambles* (Henley 2018)*, other blends: Brextipated, Brexeternity* (ibid.), *Bregret, breferendum, regrexit, brexhausted, Brexpats, (point of no) Breturn, bremorse, Brenial* (Lalić-Krstin, Silaški 2018), derivatives: *brexite(e)r, Brexit-esque, post-Brexit, pre-Brexit, anti-Brexit,* and compounds: *Brexitography, Brexitology, Brexitophobia* (ibid.). Playfulness, irony, and satire present in

these blends are not only a linguistic phenomenon but an expression of the speaker's political stance.

The word Brexit also inspired neologisms containing the second part of the blend, such as *Megxit (Meghan + exit,* Prince Harry and his wife Meghan stepping back as members of the British royal family), *Frexit (France + exit), Irexit (Ireland + exit), Polexit (Poland/Polish + exit), Lexit (left-wing exit), Scexit (Scottish + exit* from the UK). Some of the blends listed in corpus NOW are ambiguous, which is common for abbreviated lexemes, e.g. *Wexit:*

(1) the exit of the big four banks from wealth management, known as Wexit (NOW),

(2) Maverick Party (formerly the Wexit party) that would see Western Canada separate from the eastern provinces (NOW),

(3) Wexit: The possible withdrawal of Wales and England from the European Union (Collins Dictionary).

Another example of a social change that has affected the whole world recently is the pandemic of COVID-19, which has brought about an outburst of neologisms, dubbed Coronaspeak. D. Crystal (2020) claims that blends prevail among corona-related neologisms. He even called his article *Covocabulary*, i.e. using a blend of *corona + vocabulary.* Compared to Brexit, blends related to the pandemic of COVID-19 have been created with the splinters **cov-** or **corona-** as the first part of blends: *covidiot[5] (covid + idiot), covideo (covid + video), covidient (covid + obedient), covidivorce, coronanoia (corona + paranoia), coronaspiracy (corona + conspiracy), coronacation (corona + vacation), coronials (corona + millennials),* etc. However, these splinters were not by far the only ones used in 'covocabulary'. New coinages like *quarantini (quarantine + martini), locktail (lockdown + cocktail), blursday (blurred day)* display a high level of linguistic ingenuity and humour is used as a coping mechanism to handle the difficult situations during the COVID pandemic, or as Crystal (2020) puts it: "… the humour is good for us. Laughing in the face of the enemy."

The element of humour, especially satire and sarcasm, is also present in blends of names of political opponents: *libtard (liberal + retard)* and analogically created *trumptard (Trump + retard).* While *liberal* is included in official dictionaries as "(offensive, slang) a person considered naively liberal" (Collins Dictionary), its counterparts like *conservatwat (conservative + twat), retardican (retard + Republican),* or *Repugnicant (Republican + repugnant)* appear only in dictionaries of slang (Urban Dictionary), similarly to *democrap (Democrat + crap),* i.e. the lexemes have undergone lexicali-

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[5] Covidiots (plural) is the most frequent covid- blend according to NOW.

sation but they have not been standardised yet. The blends comprising names or surnames of politicians are often combined with derogatory terms, attacking political figures or whole groups: *killary (killer + Hillary (Clinton)), hilliary (Hillary + liar), trumpanzee (Trump + chimpanzee), trumptanic (Trump + Titanic), trumpzilla (Trump + Godzilla), Nobama (no + Obama).* These blends have been classified as political portmanteaus and research into online political discourse shows that most of them can be labelled offensive (Hossain et al. 2020).

One of the once quite popular political blends that was not defamatory includes *Merkozy (Merkel + Sarkozy)* denoting the close cooperation between French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. When François Hollande succeeded Sarkozy as French president, new blends were suggested: "Merging first names to make Frangela is too familiar for leaders who barely know each other. Homer is too American (or worse, Greek). Merkollande sounds too close to Merkozy. That leaves just the shortened Merde, which at least sums up the state of the euro" (The Economist 2012). None of these blends, however, survived in the lexicon for much longer than the presidency of François Hollande, not to speak about *Merkron (Merkel + Macron)* that did not catch on at all.

It is interesting to note that once a splinter gains in productivity, it is less emotionally charged, which can be illustrated with examples of -gate,-(o)mics, and -flation.

After Watergate in 1972, the compound itself has become synonymous with any scandal, especially if it involves a cover-up or covert activities (Barrett 2004). The splinter -gate has been added to many other nouns, whether proper or common: *climategate, pizzagate, partygate, Iraqgate (COCA), Clintorngate, Monicagate, Whitewatergate, Cartergate, stalkergate*, etc. (for a more comprehensive list see Barrett 2004: 19). Rather than being derogative, these blends are more of 'journalistic shortcuts' (Barrett 2004: 18).

Another splinter that became increasingly popular is -(o)mics. As early as 1969, Nixonian economics was tagged as *Nixonomics* (Barrett 2004: 25). From then on, other types of –(o)nomics were coined: *Reaganomics, Freakonomics, Clintonomics, peoplenomics, Trumponomics, Gorbanomics, Hooveronomics*[6] (COCA). As remarked by Barrett, *Hooveronomics* and *Jacksonomics* were formed long after the presidents were dead.

An analogical process can be observed with the formative -flation, which is part of the word *inflation: stagflation, oilflation, medflation, Bidenflation* (NOW), *Trumpflation, Obamaflation, Carterflation,* etc. The

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[6] The blends are ordered according to their frequency in the corpus.

splinter does not carry meaning but its productivity has led to its lexicalisation and the complex words created with it show a high regularity like the blends with *-(o)nomics*.

At the linguistic level, these splinters are undergoing a transformation process of becoming bound morphemes (Callies 2016) and thus words comprising them should be treated as compounds.

Blends in Slovak political discourse

Blending in the Slovak language is a much less productive word-formation process than in English. Most blends used in Slovak were adapted from English with or without orthographical changes or as calques. Numerous examples include *Brexit, covidiot/kovidiot, demokratúra (democratorship), demonkracia/démonkracia (demoncracy), haktivista (hacktivist), katoliban/ec (Catholiban), Merkozy, pharming, politicída (politicide), prestitút/ka (presstitute), stagflácia (stagflation), vorkoholik (workoholic)*, etc.

Only individual cases of blends based on Slovak words have been attested in the substandard lexicon, used mostly in internet discussions as derogatory terms: *OLAJNO (OĽANO + lajno* = the abbreviation of the name of the political party + crap, shit), *Igiot (Igor + idiot* = name of ex-PM and minister of finance Igor Matovič + idiot*), posranec (poslanec + posranec* = MP + coward or a person suffering from diarrhoea), *ficílska mafia (Fico + sicílska* = surname of the former Slovak PM + Sicilian). The last example is relatively unique from a linguistic point of view, as most blends belong to the part of speech identical with its splinters, while in this case, the combination of the proper noun (*Fico*) with an adjective (*sicílska*) results in an adjective *ficílska* in the feminine gender due to the collocation with *mafia* (feminine noun).

There are also interlingual blends, such as the lexemes *Slovensko* and *Slovakia* that have become parts of two telescopes, where two full words overlap. The first is *sLOVEnsko,* also written as *S♥nsko* – using an emoji of a heart symbolising the English word *love*, thus combining Slovak and English. The second example – *SlovaKIA* is a blend of the country's name in English with the highlighted brand name of the South Korean car producer, which has its manufacturing plant in Slovakia, Žilina. Thanks to this creative process, both examples are used for promotional and advertising purposes.

Conclusion

Blends, like other neologisms, reflect people's need to name new realities, thus being the expression of societal changes. The popularity of blends in contemporary media can be ascribed to their traits of linguistic wordplay and creativity, which make these coinages attractive to audiences. At the same time, humour is a coping mechanism with uncertainties people have to face like it was during Brexit and the pandemic of COVID-19 that both triggered an 'explosion' of new coinages. It is to be seen which of them survive the test of time. Satire and irony reflected in blends found in political discourse may even lead to hate speech, especially when the blends are aimed at political opponents. The productivity of blending in present-day English leads to blends being adopted into other languages, including Slovak.

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