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FROM BREXITEERS TO BROFLAKES AND COVIDIOTS: HOW PRAGMATIC PRINCIPLES OF BLENDING FUNCTION

The paper touches upon the idea that blending in Modern English might be (and in fact is) a productive means of word-formation, hence a limitless source of neologisms, due to their flexibility, and semantic and pragmatic valency. This type of language is an unavoidable consequence of the fast technological advances, political, economic and social changes that are documented in English as an international language of technology, negotiations, cultural issues, etc.

Key words: *blending, compound blends, word-formation, neologism, semantic and pragmatic valency, political discourse, social media*

English is a dynamic language which evolves day by day. A huge influence on the influx of new words play the changes that occur outside of the language, in a plethora of spheres such as politics, economy, science, etc.

Blending is a type of word-formation which is defined by Lexico /www.lexico.com/ as "a word made up of parts of two other words and combining their meanings". Even though *blends* share properties of the referents of both elements, they aren't necessarily easily discernible. *Blending* is also described as "a mechanism of language play whose comic effect is based on the change of meaning of the graphic pattern of the lexical units" /Григорьева, 2019/.

According to A. Tyler and V. Evans, conceptual structure reflects how human beings are involved with the world they live in as this world creates necessary "raw sense substrate for the conceptual system" /Tyler, Evans, 2003/. A. Tyler and V. Evans discuss further ***pragmatic inferencing*** which influences the development of lexical meaning. Moreover, they claim that "meaning extension is usage based and pragmatic in nature". One of the most important ideas in their research about lexical meaning is concerned with their postulate that "linguistic utterances act as minimal prompts for conceptual construction which is far richer than the combined information provided by the lexical items" /Tyler, Evans, 2003/. That thesis strongly supports the ideas of Fauconnier, Langacker and Turner who are

convinced that human beings use words which are referring to the knowledge which is stored in their conceptual system and meaning can be activated by means of inference strategies only /Fauconnier, 2004; Langacker, 2007; Fauconnier, Turner, 2002/.

Nowadays the **Principle of Semantic Compositionality** has been viewed by some linguists /Pelletier, 2004/ as irrelevant and not functioning properly. According to this principle meaning of a sentence/phrase/expression can be understood by means of the function of the meaning of its parts.

Conceptual integration network model stresses conceptual blending as its central process. It uses a network model for constructing a meaning. Fauconnier proposes a set of elements characteristic for the process of conceptual blending. These are: input structures, generic structures and blend structures. All of them are supposed to be mental spaces which Fauconnier defines as "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action. … [They] are structured by frames and cognitive models" /Fauconnier, 2004/.

Fauconnier and Turner underline the importance of the **relevance principle** while analyzing compound blends which they define as "…an element in the blend that should have relevance, including relevance for establishing links to other spaces and for running the blend" /Fauconnier, Turner, 2002: 333/. Schmid maintains that this principle underlines a pure pragmatic function of the compound which means that communicators have to make their speech relevant to a particular context as well as the elements of the blend must have connection to the blend itself and the network of spaces. He is convinced that relevance does play a significant role for the blending process, in particular it triggers it. He considers that "in the case of new compounds, hearers and test informants feel forced to blend the two input spaces because they inadvertently assume that the two constituents of one single lexeme must be related in some way" /Schmid, 2011: 229/.

Schmid further continues that relevant connections between counterparts of the blend are set by principles of gestalt perception which are **adjacency, proximity, continuation** and **closure.** Regarding **adjacency principle,** the counterparts of the blend are located next to each other. Due to the proximity principle they are close to each other. **Continuation principle** means that counterparts build one phonological unit and a **closure principle** stresses the idea that the compound has spaces on either side in writing /Schmid, 2011/.

This short discussion was influenced by the cognitive analysis of adjective-noun conceptual integration networks conducted by E. Tribushinina /Tribushinina, 2011/. While performing research of perceptual meanings in adjective-noun compounds she suggested a range of factors determining the active zone of SPACE entity. She differentiated between *perceptual salience*, *contrasting function*,

functional value and *discourse constraints*. Some of these factors are true for interpreting the meaning of new N+N compounds as well and can be activated while analyzing other zones besides SPACE zone. Analyzing discourse constraints, she claims that a word that is used in different contexts can refer to different mental spaces which underlines the fact that it cannot have the same semantic "contribution to every combination in which it occurs, which is against the principle of compositionality" /Tribushinina, 2011/.

In the world of politics, it has become imperative to use catchy words and phrases in order to hold the attention of the supporters or voters. A couple of relatively recent examples are highlighted below. The instances of blending in context 1 and 3 are taken from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>). The other examples represent the social media, namely Facebook (<www.facebook.com>). The definitions are retrieved from a number of popular dictionaries (see Reference).

E.g. 1. **Brexiteer** (frequency of usage – 2) British *informal,* a person who is in favour of the United Kingdom withdrawing from the European Union, early 21st century: from **Brexit** (2012: blend of **British** (or Britain) and *exit*, probably on the pattern of Grexit (coined earlier in the same year)) + *-eer*; the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. According to *Lexico* (<www.lexico.com>) (powered by Oxford) Grexit is a "term for the potential withdrawal of Greece from the eurozone (the economic region formed by those countries in the European Union that use the euro as their national currency)".

Trump Overhauls Campaign in Dramatic Shake-up

*Well, of course, it all started with the EU referendum won 52 to 48 by those who wanted Britain come out of the European Union. Since we had political carnage. David Cameron who had called the referendum, obviously expecting to win it, resigned as prime minister but announced he was going to resign probably at the end of September. Boris Johnson was then the favorite to succeed him. He fell out with his fellow **Brexiteer**, Michael Gove, another of the campaigners for leave...*

*…So, we'll have to see whether she is able to keep the confidence of those who voted for leave, because, of course, Andrea Leadsom who has now withdrawn from the contest, was arguing that it takes a **Brexiteer**, it takes somebody who voted for and campaigned for Britain to leave the European Union to be able to conduct the negotiations to do so properly that...* /https://corpus.byu.edu/coca//.

E.g. 2. **Megxit –** a blend of the words "Meghan" and "exit", a play on the word "Brexit". On 8 January 2020, Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex, and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex, announced about their decision to "step back as 'senior' members" of the British royal family. The event was labelled Megxit. The

newly coined term became widely used by social and news media. The New York Times commented on it: "Megxit Is the New Brexit in a Britain Split by Age and Politics" /nytimes.com/.

Megxit is the New Brexit in a Britain Split by Age and Politics

*It started with the catchword "**Megxit**," a tabloid editor's clever play on Brexit, published in The Sun soon after Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, announced their plans to leave Britain and live in North America part of the year...*

*"With Brexit, Britain is choosing to leave the European Union," said Meera Selva, director of the Reuters Journalism Fellowship Program at Oxford University, "and yet with **Megxit**, there is this outrage that someone is choosing to leave Britain"... /nytimes.com/*

Macmillan Dictionary describes it as "a humorous term for the decision of the Duke and Duchess of Sussex to step back from their royal duties" /macmillandictionary.com/. However, not all the well-known dictionaries have added the blend to their lists.

E.g. 3. **Broflake** (frequency of usage – 10), early 21st century: blend of *bro* (a male friend often used as a form of address) and *snowflake* (an overly sensitive or easily offended person, or one who believes they are entitled to special treatment on account of their supposedly unique characteristics.), derogatory, informal. A man who is readily upset or offended by progressive attitudes that conflict with his more conventional or conservative views /www.lexico.com/.

There's a new kind of bro in town. We call him a "Broflake".

*If you've been fortunate enough not to hear this word before, let me ruin it for you: snowflake is a derogatory term used against progressives deemed to be too soft on issues of national importance, including immigration and all female Wonder Woman screenings. Following Trump's election, the word spiked in popularity, so some liberals have started to fight back the best way they knew how: by popularizing the term "**broflake**" instead. # In American political internet discourse, you're either a snowflake or a **broflake**. Or you're a smart person who's deleted their Twitter account.*

*# **Broflake**s share a little bit in common with their despised cousin, snowflake. Like snowflakes, **broflake**s are especially sensitive to issues of race, class and gender /https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/.*

In the wake of the year 2020 a global pandemic called COVID 19, more widely known as the new coronavirus, broke out. The media was not slow in responding to the critical situation by creating new, sometimes funny, blends. Let's consider the most recent ones:

E.g. 4. **Covidiot** – a blend of the words *coronavirus (COVID 19)* and *idiot*, an informal and insulting noun for "someone who ignores health advice about Covid-

19, hoards food unnecessarily, etc." /www.macmillandictionary.com/. Urban Dictionary defines the word with a slight difference as "someone who ignores the warnings regarding public health or safety, a person who hoards goods, denying them from their neighbors" /www.urbandictionary.com/.

*Did you see that **covidiot** with 300 rolls of toilet paper in his basket?*
/www.urbandictionary.com/.

*That **covidiot** is hugging everyone she sees* /www.urbandictionary.com/.

*One particularly dense #**COVIDIOT** was blocking the narrow entrance into the park* /www.macmillandictionary.com/.

E.g.5. **Covidient** is a combination of *coronavirus* and *obedient*. Unlike *covidiots*, *covidients* are people who strictly follow the directive and the orders of the government during the coronavirus outbreak /https://www.edexlive.com//.

*Thanks to numerous **covidients** the curfew was successful.*
/https://www.edexlive.com//.

*We are all **covidients** and we will cooperate with the government.*
/https://www.edexlive.com//.

E.g. 6. **Infodemic** – an early-21st-century blend of *information* and *epidemic*, not yet confirmed by some dictionaries (www.collinsdictionary.com), defined diversely as "a surfeit of information about a problem that is viewed as being a detriment to its solution" /www.lexico.com/ or as "the spread of incorrect information, especially online" /www.macmillandictionary.com/.

*"We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an **infodemic**", said WHO Director – General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus* /www.macmillan dictionary.com/.

*Join top CEOs to explore which risks are most susceptible to **infodemics** and, together, develop new strategies in reputation risk management* /www.lexico.com/.

*What is more, the information epidemic – or "**infodemic**" – has made the public health crisis harder to control and contain* /www.lexico.com/.

*Like an epidemic, an **infodemic** results in widespread dissemination; but with an infodemic, the "organism" misinformation – isolated facts mixed with speculation and rumor anxious relayed worldwide via the instant communication made possible by the internet, laptops, wireless, pages, faxes, and email* /www.lexico.com/.

E.g. 7. **Isolationship** – a social media coinage from *isolation* and *relationship*, is defined by the urban dictionary as "the deep sense of connection to self and house mates developed after long periods of social distancing" /www.urbandictionary.com/.

*Due to this pandemic, I've entered into an **isolationship** with my self and family over these many long days and nights* /www.urbandictionary.com/.

As one could notice it is not easy to interpret the meaning of new compounds relying on compositionality principle only. Moreover, it proved to be inactive while analyzing compound blends. Existing theories and approaches in cognitive semantics make us believe that lexical meaning is attached to concepts or mental spaces which are "far richer than the information contained in lexical units" /Tyler, Evans, 2003/. Most of these concepts are prototypical and metaphorical by nature as well. Conceptual integration network principles must be taken into account as compound meaning is closely related to mental structures that are extracted and interpreted by a speaker and a listener due to a relevance principle that triggers that process.

While the examples of blending highlighted in the article are the immediate reflection of the external reality which trigger in the listener the urge to extract the words into components, get their message separately, and then combine them together, matching the whole process to the relevance of the situation, a practical issue for further analysis might be establishing a link between the use of blends and certain (political and not only) processes that serve as a follow-up. Another conclusion we might draw is that social media (here Facebook) uses blending as a source of creating new words at the same time retaining a humourous effect, which could be explained by the fact that social media platforms are not purely factual in nature, but provide a source of entertainment as well.

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Ա. ՉՈՒԲԱՐՅԱՆ, Ա. ՍԻՄՈՆՅԱՆ – *Բաղարկության գործառնության գործաբանական հայեցակերպը.* – Հոդվածում դիտարկվում են ժամանակակից անգլերենի բառակազմական արդյունավետ միջոց հանդիսացող բաղարկության գործաբանական որոշ գործառույթներ: Ինչպես ցույց է տալիս նյութի քննությունը, բառակազմական այս միջոցը նաև նորաբանությունների անսպառ աղբյուր է իր ճկունության, ինչպես նաև իր իմաստաբանական և գործաբանական վալենտականության շնորհիվ: Բառակազմական նմանատիպ միջոցի կիրառումն անխուսափելի հետևանք է տեխնոլոգիական առաջընթացի, քաղաքական, տնտեսական և սոցիալական փոփոխությունների, որոնք արձանագրվում են անգլերենում՝ որպես տարբեր ոլորտներում կիրառվող միջազգային լեզվում:

Բանալի բառեր. բաղարկություն, բառաբարդում, բառակազմություն, նորաբանություն, իմաստաբանական և գործաբանական վալենտականություն, քաղաքական խոսույթ, սոցիալական մեդիա

А. ЧУБАРЯН, А. СИМОНЯН – *Прагматический аспект функционирования блендов: от брекзита до ковидиота.* – В статье рассматриваются некоторые прагматические особенности функционирования одного из самых продуктивных способов словообразования в современном английском языке – блендинга. Как показывает анализ материала исследования, блендинг служит безграничным источником неологизмов, благодаря гибкости, семантической и прагматической валентностей, присущих этому способу словообразования. Использование блендинга – неизбежное следствие быстрых технологических достижений, политических, экономических и социальных изменений, которые фиксируются на английском как международном языке.

Ключевые слова: блендинг, бленд, словообразование, неологизм, семантическая и прагматическая валентность, политический дискурс, социальные медиа