Are English Blends Predictable?

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Blending is typically the fusion of two clipped words. Input constituents are selected and sequenced for extralinguistic, pragmatic, and in some cases sound symbolic reasons, all with a view to compositional transparency of the output, which is prosodically constrained. The majority of blends can be derived by several templates. For monosyllabic and disyllabic inputs the output is normally a word of one metrical foot. For longer input words, choices exist among several two-foot types. This is one reason why different people create different blends from the same input words.

1) Syllable

- **onset**
- **rime**
- **nucleus**
- **coda**
  [+syllabic]

2) Trochaic (a) and dactylic (b) foot (F = foot, S = strong, W = weak, μ = mora)

(a) F

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
<td>σ</td>
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```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ta</th>
<th>ble</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lat.</th>
<th>μ [f]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>m</td>
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</table>

| μ | μ |

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ìo</th>
<th>na</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
```

`fé em ina ‘woman’`

(b) F

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
<td>σ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

```
| μ | μ |
```

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ìo</th>
<th>na</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
```

Lat. `fé m ina ‘woman’`

3) Monosyllabic blend

\( ð: \) bash, brunch, crash, flare, geep, meld, moobs, prance, scroll, sext, shoat, skort, smash, smaze, smog, snark, spork, twirl

4) a) Delete the onset of the second word and the nucleus and coda of the first:

```
| σ |
```

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>onset</th>
<th>rime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sp</td>
<td>[u n]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

```
| σ |
```

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[l]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o rk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>spork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
```

b) If the first word is disyllabic, it can truncate the rime of the first syllable and everything after that, e.g. br[ea]kfast x [l]unch \(\rightarrow\) brunch.

5) If the second word is a trochaic foot, it can remain, with the onset replaced by that of the first which behaves as in (4), yielding the most frequent (trochaic) type

\( ðσ \) broasted, buppie, chunnel, flurry, guppie, himbo, liger, mingy, mimsy, modem, muppet, pleather, prissy, rurban, sheeple, slanguage, Snausage, snuba, squiggle, swaption, tigon, twiddle, wussy

6) Disyllabic two-footed types: \( ðð: \) carjack, cyborg, dumbfound, hazmat, moonscape, Oxbridge, pulsar, radome, sitcom; ðð: austern, motel, sci-fi, umpteen
7) The *sitcom* type preferentially clips from the nucleus of the second syllable to the end of both words, mapping the previous second-syllable onset to the coda of the first:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Foot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
<td>σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s i</td>
<td>t(y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o c</td>
<td>m e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

8) For four- and five-syllable blends, the optimal rhythm begins with a stress:

```
σ́σσ̀σ : breathalizer, dallymony, feminazi, gerrymander, infomercial, palimony, Pictionary
```

```
σ̀σσ́σ : absotively, adultscent, affluenza, contraception, docudrama, edutainment, glitterati, hydramatic, posilutely, recomember, exploitation
```

```
σ̀σσ́σσ : Amerindian, advertorial, cafetorium, Demopublican, metrosexual, mockumentary, televangelist
```

9) *Docudrama* has a second input word *dráma*, and *recomember* has *[rē]mémber*, both trochaic feet. In *advertorial, teleevangelist*, the input of the second word is *[èdítórìal, [è]vángelist*, dactylic feet. In both types, the last or only foot of the second word remains and the first word is truncated from the second foot to the end:

10) 

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[l e k t]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

11) 

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τ ε</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l ε</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| [v i ...]
```

12) When the first input word is polysyllabic, the (10/11) pattern can apply, as in *cine[ma cóm]plèx*, where the first word is truncated after the initial trochee, and the last foot of the second word remains, but in *théo[logical] con[servative]*, only the first syllable of the second word remains, illustrating several ways to arrive at an output ôôô:

a) Other blends of the *cineplex / theocon* output structure ôôô: *banjolin, cultivar, flabbergast, hacktivist, happenstance, icecapade, medicare, positron, travelogue*

b) ôôô ~ ôôô (V/N pairs): *dancercize, gues(s)timate, jazzercise, sexercise*

13) For an input string *situation comedy*, there seems to be no way to predict whether pattern (7) or (11) will prevail. The institutionalized *sitcom* by (7) is more economical than *situcomedy*, which should also be a valid blend by (11).
15) The templates themselves can be blended. In *camcorder, camera* behaves like the first foot of (7), and *recorder* like the second foot of (10):

```
  Word
     F     F
    /\    /\ 
   o   o  o   o
  /     /     /
 /\   /\   /\   /\ 
 c a   m [e r a] c o r d e r
 /     /     /
 [r e]   c o r d e r
```

όόό: *camcorder, catalo, dramedy, tangelo, beefalo, netiquette*

16) some minor English blend types

όόο: *Eurasian, fantastic, ginormous, stagflation, transistor*

όοόό: *adaptitude, Republicrat, celebutante, fantabulous, emoticon*

όοόό: *imagineer*

όοόόό: *penultimatum, electrocution*

όοόόό: *animatronics*

όοόόόό: *priviligentsia*

όοόόόό: *blatterature*

   a) The first component of the blend (i) has fewer syllables than the second, and / or (ii) denotes a more prototypical object, and/or (iii) is more frequent.
   b) The shorter word tends to contribute more phonological content.
   c) Blend constituents often have partial segmental and/or semantic overlap.

18) In *tangelo* (*tangerine* x *pomelo*), *tangerine* is the first constituent by (17a-ii, iii). More importantly, *tángelo* is a single dactylic foot, and *pòngeríne* (*pomelo* x *tangerine*) two-footed in the least optimal stress configuration, unattested as a minor pattern (16).

19) *Mimsy* (*miserable* x *flimsy*) violates condition (17a-i) [shorter precedes longer] but was selected over *fliserable* (*flimsy* x *miserable*) because blends require an output of one or two metrical feet, and *fliserable* (όόόό) does not comply with that constraint.

20) *Pong* (*poetry* x *song*) (Fandrych 2008: 115) is most infelicitous because it is entirely opaque, and would make more sense as a blend of *poorman’s bong.*

21) Compositional transparency of the output is another consideration. For *banalysis, banal x analysis* is more transparent than, e.g. *banal x electrolysis* (Cook 2010: 63).

22) Human creativity can defy formalization. Since *influenza* was clipped to *flu* in 1827, the obvious question is why [in]fluenza was selected over *flu* to create *affluenza.* *Afflu* would have been a perfectly good blend, and more economical, but *fluenza* carries with it a humorous insistence that affluence is a disease, which is not present in *afflu.*

23) *Foolosopher* was favored over *moronosopher, idio(to)sopher,* and the like, in order to exploit the phonological similarity of *fool* and *phil-* , which permits easy recognition of the constituents and the referent (Gries 2012).

24) *Snark* (*snake* x *shark*) is preferable to the non-descript (*shake* (*shark* x *snake*) not only because *shake* would not be distinctive but also because *snark* has *sn-* suggestive of the animal’s large nose / mouth.
25) *Snausage*, a dog treat [http://snausages.com/], is blended of *snack x sausage*, but one inherently expects it to be a blend of *sausage snack*. In that case, however, the output would not have the initial *sn-* which, for a canine treat, yields the appropriate subliminal phonesthetic suggestion of *snout, snarf, snarl, snout, snort*, and so on.

**Conclusion:** The preferred output structures (one or two feet, initial / alternating stress) are more important than the templates in that there is more than one way to arrive at the same output structures. English prefers blends that begin with a stress. Trochaic structures are preferred for the first foot. A dactylic foot is ideally at the end of the blend. Input constituents are selected and sequenced for a variety of reasons, some extra-linguistic or phonesthetic, all with a view to compositional transparency of the output.

**Alphabetical list of blends**

absolutely [1914]: absolutely x positively
adaptitude [1806]: adapt x attitude
adolescent [1996]: adult x adolescent
advertisement [1914]: advertisement x editorial
affluenza [1979]: affluent x influenza
Amerindian [1899]: American x Indian
animarxions [1977]: animator x electronics
austene [1832]: austere x stern
bailojín [1889]: bailo x mandolin
bash [1942]: boot x dash
beefalo [1974]: beef x buffalo
blateture [1512]: blatet x bubble + literature
bonk [1913]: bang x conc
breathalyzer [1960]: breath x analyzer
broasted [1980]: broasted x roasted
branch [1886]: breakfast x lunch
buppie [1984]: Black x yuppie
buppy [1988]: Black x yuppie
cafetorium [1955]: cafeteria x auditorium
Californication [1997]: California x formation
camcorder [1982]: camera x recorder
carjack([1991]: car x hijack([ing)
cat(tail) [1889]: cat x buffalo
celebrate([999]: celebrity x débutante
channel [1914]: channel x tunnel
cinéplex [1978]: cinema x complex
clash [1500]: clash x crash, smash, splash
corruption(s) [1806]: corrup x conception
craz(0) [1940]: crook x dash
cubtars [1923]: cultivated x variety
cyborg [1960]: cybernetic x organism
dalliance [1987]: dalliance x palimony
dance(s) [1967]: dance x exercise
Demopolitican [n.d.]: Democrat x Republican
docudrama [1961]: documentary x drama
dreamed [1905]: drama x comedy
dumbfound [1653]: dumb x confused
edutainment [1963]: education x entertainment
electrocution [1889]: electric x execution
emotion(s) [1990]: emotion x icon
 Eurasian [1844]: European x Asian
fastabro (1959): fastastic x fabulous
feminizer [1989]: feminize x Nazi
fidgetated [c.1907]: fidgety x agitated
flare [c.1550]: flame x glare
flimsy [c.1907]: flighty x whimsical
flurry [1698]: flur x throw, fly x hurry
foolosophers [1549]: fool x philosopher
fantastic [c.1972]: flux x fantastic
futilitarian [1827]: futile x utilitarian
furry [1988]: fur x radar
gear [1971]: goat x sheep
gerrymander [1812]: Gerry x salamander
ghetto[-] [1957]: glitter x little/near
ghetto[-ator] [2002]: ghetto x terrorist
guessedimate [1936]: guess x estimate
guppy [1914]: guy x yuppy
hack([e]r) [1995]: hack(x) x activist
happenstance [1897]: happening x circumstance
hazmat [1980]: hazardous x material
himbo [1988]: him x bimbo
hydraulic [1951]: hydraulic x automatic
icecapade [1941]: ice x escapade
imagin([e]r) [1942]: imagine x engineer
informercial [1981]: information x commercial
liger [1938]: lion x tiger
med[d] [1956]: med x weld
metrosexual [1994]: metropolitan x hetero / homosexual
mimy [1855]: miserable x flimzy
mime [1911]: mean x stingy
mocktail [1936]: mock x cocktail
mockumentary [1963]: mock x documentary
modem [1958]: modulator x demodulator
moo(s)[s] [1990]: man x boos
mooncape [1987]: moon x landscape
motel [1925]: motor x hotel
Motown [1959]: Motor x town
moped [1959]: marionette x puppet
netiquette [1982]: internet x etiquette
Oxfordbridge [1849]: Oxford x Cambidge
palimony [1927]: pal x alimony
penulimatum [1882]: penultimate x ultimate
Pietonomy [1985]: picture x dictionary
pleather [1961]: plastic x leather
positively [1920]: positively x absolutely
positron [1933]: positive x electron
prance [c.1380]: proud x dance
pringie [1894]: print x sissy
privilegiania [1953]: privilege x intelligensia
pujar [1968]: puring x star
quasar [1964]: quasi x stellar
radome [1944]: radar x dome
recollect [1852]: recollect x remember
Republican[1987]: Republican x Democrat
rockumentary [1969]: rock x documentary
rurban [1915]: rural x urban
sc[i] [1965]: science x fiction
scroll [c.1400]: scroll x roll
sexcapade [1953]: sex x escape
sexercise [1942]: sex x exercise
sexploitation [1924]: sex x exploitation
sexting(2005): sex x texting
sheepie [1945]: sheep x people
shoo [1969]: sheep x goat
shopportunity [n.d.]: shop x opportunity
sitcom [1964]: situation x comedy
skort([s]) [1951]: skirt x shorts
slangusage [1879]: slang x language
smash [1699]: snort x unbreakable
smarm [1953]: smoke x haze
snog [1884]: smoke x fog
snark [1876]: snake x shirk
Snausage [n.d.]: snack x sausage
snertilization [1849]: snivel x civilization
snuba [1989]: snorkel x scuba
spork [1969 1x]: spooze x fork
spinapple [1984]: squeeze x wiggle
stagnation [1965]: stagnation x inflation
stacycation [2005]: stay x vacation
swappian [1988]: swap x option
tangle [1904]: tangerine x pomelo
telelaunches [1973]: television x evangelist
thencon [n.d.]: theologian x conservative
thigoun [1927]: tiger x lion
transistor [1948]: transistor x resistor
travellage [1903]: travel x monologue
trw[[1547]: twist x twist x fiddle/piddle
twirl[1598]: rotate x whirl
wussy [1977]: wuss x punk
zillion [1944]: z = last in a sequence x million

**Select references**


