Are English Blends Predictable?

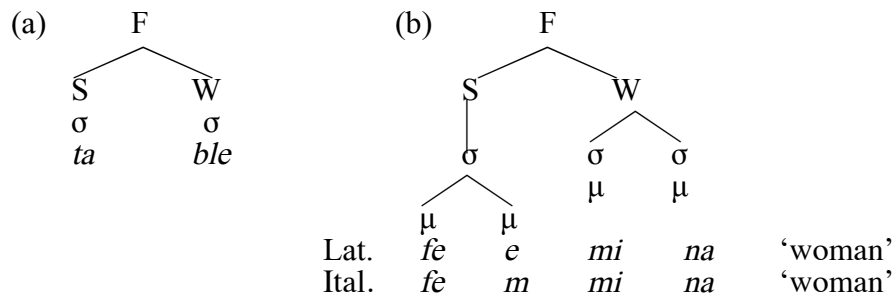D. Gary Miller   University of
dgm@ufl.edu   Florida 3/14/13

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.
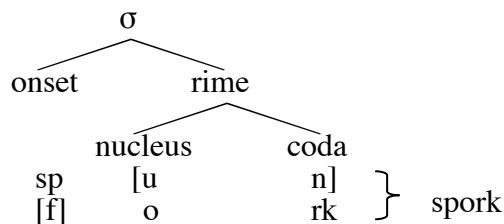
1)   Syllable   σ

            onset   rime

                  nucleus   coda
                  [+syllabic]
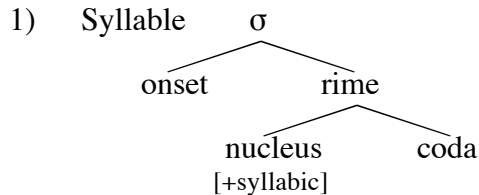
2)   Trochaic (a) and dactylic (b) foot (F = foot, S = strong, W = weak, μ = mora)

      (a)   F   (b)   F

            S   W   S   W
            σ   σ   σ   σ   σ
            ta   ble   μ   μ

                                            μ   μ
                              Lat.   fe   e   mi   na   'woman'
                              Ital. fe   m   mi   na   'woman'

3)   Monosyllabic blend
      ́σ: *bash, brunch, crash, flare, geep, meld, moobs, prance, scroll, sext, shoat, skort, smash, smaze, smog, snark, spork, twirl*

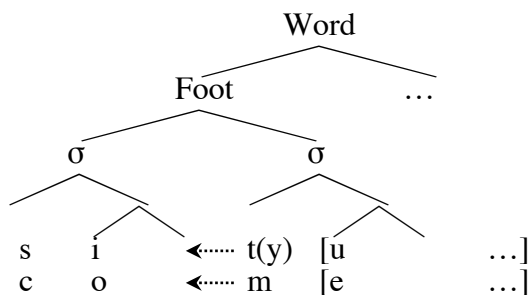4)   a)   Delete the onset of the second word and the nucleus and coda of the first:

                        σ

            onset   rime

                  nucleus   coda
            sp   [u   n]
            [f]   o   rk   } spork

      b)   If the first word is disyllabic, it can truncate the rime of the first syllable and everything after that, e.g. *br[eakfast]* x *[l]unch* → *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

      ́σσ   *broasted, buppie, chunnel, flurry, guppie, himbo, liger, mingy, mimsy, modem, muppet, pleather, prissy, rurban, sheeple, slanguage, Snausage, snuba, squiggle, swaption, tigon, twiddle, wussy*
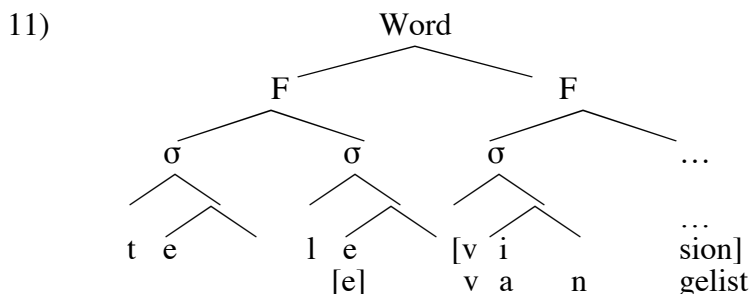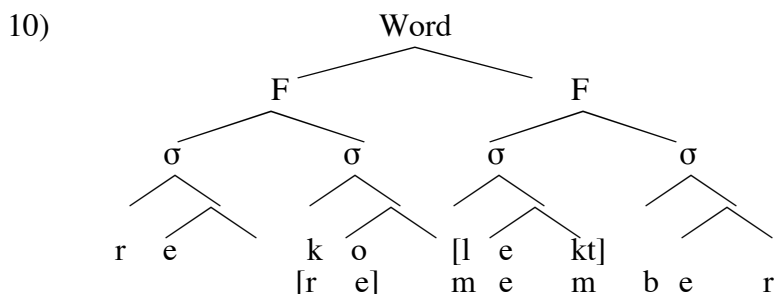
6)   Disyllabic two-footed types: ́σ̀: *carjack, cyborg, dumbfound, hazmat, moonscape, Oxbridge, pulsar, radome, sitcom*; ̀σ́: *austern, motel, sci-fi, umpteen*

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:

```
                        Word
                       /    \
                   Foot      …
                  /    \
                 σ      σ
               / |      / \
              s  i  ◄┈┈ t(y) [u      …]
              c  o  ◄┈┈ m    [e      …]
```

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

óσòσ: *breathalizer, dallymony, feminazi, gerrymander, infomercial, palimony, Pictionary*

òσóσ: *absotively, adultescent, affluenza, contraception, docudrama, edutainment, glitterati, hydramatic, posilutely, recomember, sexploitation*

òσóσσ: *Amerindian, advertorial, cafetorium, Demopublican, metrosexual, mockumentary, televangelist*

9) *Docudrama* has a second input word *dráma*, and *recomember* has [*rè*]*mémber*, both trochaic feet. In *advertorial, televangelist*, the input of the second word is [*èdí*]*tórial*, [*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)

```
                       Word
                      /      \
                 F              F
               /   \          /   \
              σ     σ        σ      σ
             / \   / \      / | \   / \
            r  e  k  o    [l e kt]  …
                 [r e]    m e  m  b e   r
```

11)

```
                       Word
                      /      \
                 F              F
               /   \          /   \
              σ     σ        σ      …
             / \   / \      / | \
            t  e  l  e    [v i        sion]
                 [e]      v a   n    gelist
```

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

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

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

14) 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):
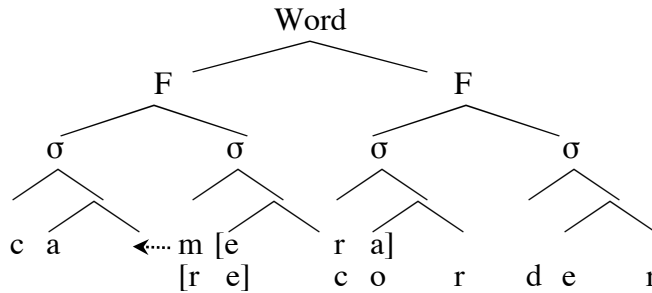
óσσ: *camcorder, catalo, dramedy, tangelo, beefalo, netiquette*

16) some minor English blend types

ὸóσ:	*Eurasian, funtastic, ginormous, stagflation, transistor*
σóσὸ:	*adaptitude, Republicrat, celebutante, fantabulous, emoticon*
σὸσó:	*imagineer*
σὸσóσ:	*penultimatum, electrocution*
ὸσσóσ:	*animatronics*
ὸσσóσσ:	*priviligentsia*
óσσὸ:	*blatterature*

17) Input conditions (Kelly 1998: 580f.; Cook 2010: 47ff.; Gries 2004, 2006, 2012)
   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* (óσσσ) 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, snoot, 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

absotively [1914]: *absolutely* x *positively*
adaptitude [1806]: *adapt* x *attitude*
adultescent [1996]: *adult* x *adolescent*
advertorial [1914]: *advertisement* x *editorial*
affluenza [1979]: *affluent* x *influenza*
Amerindian [1899]: *American* x *Indian*
animatronics [1971]: *animated* x *electronics*
austerne [a1382]: *austere* x *stern*
banjolin [1889]: *banjo* x *mandolin*
bash [a1642]: *beat/bat* x *dash*
beefalo [1974]: *beef* x *buffalo*
blatterature [1512]: *blatter* 'babble' + *literature*
bonk [1931]: *bang* x *conk*
breathalyzer [1960]: *breath* x *analyzer*
broasted [1980s]: *broiled* x *roasted*
brunch [1896]: *breakfast* x *lunch*
Buppie [1984]: *Black* x *yuppie*
buppie [1988]: *black* x *guppie*
cafetorium [a1955]: *cafeteria* x *auditorium*
Californication [1997]: *California* x *fornication*
camcorder [1982]: *camera* x *recorder*
carjack(ing) [1991]: *car* x *hijack(ing)*
cat(t)alo [1889]: *cattle* x *buffalo*
celebutante [1939]: *celebrity* x *débutante*
chunnel [1914]: *channel* x *tunnel*
cineplex [1978]: *cinema* x *complex*
clash [?1500]: *clap* x *crash, smash, splash*
contraception [1886]: *contra* x *conception*
crash [?a1400]: *crack* x *dash*
cultivar [1923]: *cultivated* x *variety*
cyborg [1960]: *cyber(netic)* x *organism*
dallymony [1987]: *dalliance* x *palimony*
dancercise [1967]: *dance* x *exercise*
Demopublican [n.d.]: *Democrat* x *Republican*
docudrama [1961]: *documentary* x *drama*
dramedy [1905]: *drama* x *comedy*
dumbfound [1653]: *dumb* x *confound*
edutainment [1983]: *education* x *entertainment*
electrocution [1889]: *electric* x *execution*
emoticon [1990]: *emotion* x *icon*
Eurasian [1844]: *European* x *Asian*
fantabulous [1959]: *fantastic* x *fabulous*
feminazi [1989]: *feminist* x *Nazi*
fidgitated [c.1907] 'uneasy': *fidgety* x *agitated*
flare [c.1550]: *flame* x *glare* (?)

flimsical [c.1907]: *flighty* x *whimsical*
flurry [1698]: *flurr* 'throw, fly' (?) x *hurry*
fooleosophers [1549]: *fool* x *philosopher*
funtastic [c.1972]: *fun* x *fantastic*
futilitarian [1827]: *futile* x *utilitarian*
gaydar [1988]: *gay* x *radar*
geep [1971]: *goat* x *sheep*
gerrymander [1812]: *Gerry* x *salamander*
ginormous [1948]: *gigantic* x *enormous*
glitterati [1956]: *glitter* x *lit(t)erati*
governator [c.2002]: *governor* x *terminator*
gues(s)timate [1936]: *guess* x *estimate*
guppie [1984]: *gay* x *yuppie*
hacktivist [1995]: *hack(er)* x *activist*
happenstance [1897]: *happening* x *circumstance*
hazmat [1980]: *hazardous* x *material*
himbo [1988]: *him* x *bimbo*
hydramatic [1951]: *hydraulic* x *automatic*
icecapade [1941]: *ice* x *escapade*
imagineer [1942]: *imagine* x *engineer*
infomercial [1981]: *information* x *commercial*
liger [1938]: *lion* x *tiger*
medicare [1953]: *medical* x *care*
meld [1936]: *melt* x *weld*
metrosexual [1994]: *metropolitan* x *hetero / homosexual*
mimsy [1855]: *miserable* x *flimsy*
mingy [1911]: *mean* x *stingy*
mocktail [1936]: *mock* x *cocktail*
mockumentary [1965]: *mock* x *documentary*
modem [1958]: *modulator* x *demodulator*
moobs [1990]: *man* x *boobs*
moonscape [1907]: *moon* x *landscape*
motel [1925]: *motor* x *hotel*
Motown [1959]: *Motor* x *town*
muppet [1959]: *marionette* (?) x *puppet*
netiquette [1982]: *(inter)net* x *etiquette*
Oxbridge [1849]: *Oxford* x *Cambridge*
palimony [1927]: *pal* x *alimony*
penultimatum [1882]: *penultimate* x *ultimatum*
Pictionary [1985]: *picture* x *dictionary*
pleather [1982]: *plastic* x *leather*
posilutely [1920]: *positively* x *absolutely*
positron [1933]: *positive* x *electron*
prance [c.1380]: *proud* x *dance*

prissy [1894]: *prim* x *sissy*
priviligentsia [1953]: *privilege* x *intelligentsia*
pulsar [1968]: *pulsating* x *star*
quasar [1964]: *quasi* x *stellar*
radome [1944]: *radar* x *dome*
recomember [1852]: *recollect* x *remember*
Republicrat [1872]: *Republican* x *Democrat*
rockumentary [1969]: *rock* x *documentary*
rurban [1915]: *rural* x *urban*
sci-fi [1955]: *science* x *fiction*
scroll [c.1400]: *scrow* x *roll*
sexcapade [1951]: *sex* x *escapade*
sexercise [1942]: *sex* x *exercise*
sexploitation [1924]: *sex* x *exploitation*
sext(ing) [2005]: *sex* x *text(ing)*
sheeple [1945]: *sheep* x *people*
shoat [1969]: *sheep* x *goat*
shopporunity [n.d.]: *shop* x *opportunity*
sitcom [1964]: *situation* x *comedy*
skort(s) [1951]: *skirt* x *shorts*
slanguage [1879]: *slang* x *language*
smash [1699]: *smite/smack* x *mash*
smaze [1953]: *smoke* x *haze*
smog [1884]: *smoke* x *fog*
snark [1876]: *snake* x *shark*
Snausage [n.d.]: *snack* x *sausage*
snivelization [1849]: *snivel* x *civilization*
snuba [1989]: *snorkel* x *scuba*
spork [1909 1x; 1970]: *spoon* x *fork*
squiggle [1804]: *squirm* x *wiggle*
stagflation [1965]: *stagnation* x *inflation*
staycation [2005] *stay* [*at home*] x *vacation*
swaption [a1988]: *swap* x *option*
tangelo [1904]: *tangerine* x *pomelo*
televangelist [1973]: *television* x *evangelist*
theocon [n.d.]: *theological* x *conservative*
tigon [1927]: *tiger* x *lion*
transistor [1948]: *transfer* x *resistor*
travelogue [1903]: *travel* x *monologue*
twiddle [a1547]: *twirl/twist* x *fiddle/piddle*
twirl [1598]: *tirl* 'rotate' x *whirl*
wussy [1977] / *wuss* [1976]: *wimp* x *pussy*
zillion [1944]: *z* = last in a sequence x *million*

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