PORTMANTEAU WORDS IN ENGLISH

Sanel Hadžiahmetović Jurida, PhD
University of Tuzla, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Department of English Language and Literature – Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina
sanel.h.jurida@untz.ba

Abstract: Languages behave like living organisms, they are created, they live through their own use, and moreover they grow. The growth of a language is indicated by way of numerous processes that occur in it, one of which is word formation. People influence the lexicon of their language in various ways. Sometimes it is the bare necessity that compels us to form new words, other times it is purely accidental. Even though words appear and disappear, the English lexicon retained its present size, in part, due to the creation of new words on the basis of the ones that already exist. Presently, the development of science and technology, and consequently, the Internet brings about a high rate of lexical expansion. This phenomenon is reflected in the changes of vocabulary through creation of new specialized terminology. In any case, newly coined words help people successfully conduct their every day responsibilities as well as leisure time. One manner in which new words are created, chiefly popularised by Lewis Carroll in the 19th century, is blending two words to form a new one, also known as portmanteau. Portmanteau is a word that is familiar to luggage enthusiasts; moreover, it is a word familiar to language enthusiasts as well. Innovative and entertaining, these portmanteau words are ubiquitous in advertising, newspapers, or media. Some, like smog, brunch, or motel, express such unique concepts that they made their permanent place in the English vocabulary. This paper discusses the origin, process and use of portmanteau words denoting that they, indeed, have a special place in the English language.

1. INTRODUCTION: WORD FORMATION IN ENGLISH

Word formation in English is a very prolific area since there are many ways in which words are generated. Lieber (2005) presents compounding as one of the main ways of coining new words into the English lexicon. Two ways of compounding can be distinguished, one of which has to do with synthetic compounds. These types of compounds contain the second stem derived from a verb. Some examples of synthetic compounds are truck driver, wind-blown, waste disposal or revenue enhancement. The second way of compounding is root compound (also called primary compound) which contains deverbal second stem. Examples of root compounds are dog bowl, file cabinet, sky blue or red hot. In addition to compounding, another very dynamic way of generating new vocabulary, according to Lieber (2005) is derivation. Derivation is normally denoted as affixation, i.e. suffixation and prefixation. There is an extensive variety of suffixes and prefixes which are very productive and which can be utilized to form many different new coinages. Examples of derivation in English language are numerous, such as unfriendly, illegality, uniqueness or deceitful. Next, conversion or functional shift is a process by which words extend their grammatical function. Example of this type of word formation is from noun to verb (position in positioning people), or from verb to noun (run in go for a run) (Lieber, 2005). In addition, McArthur (1992: 1123) presents back-formation as a method which represents the creation of forms that are shorter or simpler from pre-existing, more complex, forms. Verb edit from editor, or intuit from intuition can be taken as an example of back-formation. Furthermore, the same author discusses abbreviation, also a type of word formation, which denotes the shortening of words and phrases, consisting of iniatilism, the acronym and clipping. BBC is an example of initialism, NATO is an example of acronym, and pro from professional, phone from telephone or flu from influenza are all examples of clipping. The aforementioned examples of abbreviation all include shortening of words to coin new phrases. In addition, McArthur (1992) introduces another type of word formation known as root-creation. This process denotes formation of new roots or bases, such as atlas from the mythical titan or gin from the city of Genoa. Finally, one of the most fashionable and prolific types of forming new words is blending or portmanteau. Portmanteau or blending comprises integrating two words into one, such as breakfast and lunch into brunch, or electro and execute into electrocute (McArthur, 1992). Plag (2003) summarises this by stating that there is a host of possibilities speakers of a language have at their disposal (or had so in the past, when the words were first coined) to create new words on the basis of existing ones, including the addition and subtraction of phonetic (or orthographic) material. The study of word-formation can, thus, be defined as the study of the ways in which new complex words are built on the basis of other words or morphemes. Some consequences of such a definition will be discussed in the following section.

2. THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD PORTMANTEAU

The term is borrowed from the French word portmanteau which is, in fact, a blend word itself. Two words that blended together to form the French word are porter, meaning to carry, and manteau, meaning cloak or mantle. Therefore, aforementioned example shows that word blending is present not only in English but in other
languages as well. In literal translation, the word portmanteau might have a meaning It carries a cloak. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the English word portmanteau, borrowed from French as far back as the 16th century, denotes a large leather suitcase that opens up into two separate compartments that are usually identical.

The origin of the word portmanteau in connection with word formation dates back to the renowned Victorian author Lewis Carroll. He is acknowledged as the originator of the concept portmanteau word as well as the first to use it in print (Algeo, 2010). It was the character Humpty Dumpty in Carroll’s book “Through the looking-glass” who first associated the large two-part suitcase with the process of word construction. In one of the chapters of the book, the character Alice is perplexed by the nonsensical poem “Jabberwocky”. However, Humpty Dumpty interprets the strange-sounding words in the poem for Alice’s better understanding. Therefore, the word slithy is a combination of words slimy and lithe, and the word mimsy is combined from miserable and flimsy. The character Humpty Dumpty clears up Alice’s confusion by saying: “You see it’s like a portmanteau – there are two meanings packed up in one word (Carroll, 1887).” Lewis Carroll further explains the use of the term portmanteau in connection to word formation in his preface to the book “The Hunting of the Snark”:

Humpty-Dumpty’s theory, of two meanings packed into one word like a portmanteau, seems to me the right explanation for all. For instance, take the two words “fuming” and “furious”. Make up your mind that you will say both words, but leave it unsettled which you will say first. Now open your mouth and speak. If your thoughts incline ever so little towards “fuming”, you will say “fuming-furious” if they turn, by even a hair’s breadth, towards “furious”, you will say “furious-fuming” but if you have that rarest of gifts, a perfectly balanced mind, you will say “fruminous”.

(Carroll, 1876)

The examples slithy, mimsy or fruminous, referred to above, are only a few portmanteau words that Carroll introduced into English. Merriam-Webster dictionary recognizes chortle, a coinage of Lewis Carroll as well, a combination of chuckle and snort, meaning to laugh or chuckle especially in satisfaction or exultation, noting the first known use in 1872. One can refer to Merriam-Webster to find galumph, a blend of gallop and triumphant, which also dates back to the 1872, meaning to move with a clumsy heavy tread. This might not be the meaning Carroll intended since for him the notion carries the literal blend of the two constructing words. Hence, it can be concluded that Lewis Carroll set in motion the portmanteau word constructions that only became further used up to the present.

Owing to the broad scope of creativity it offers, portmanteau, that Carroll popularised, became a prominent literary device many authors exploited in their works. In his novel “Finnegan’s Wake” James Joyce (1939) uses several instances of portmanteau words. As an illustration there are following examples: ethiquetical is formed from ethics and etiquette, laysense blends layman and sense, sinduced is a portmanteau of sin and seduced, and fadograph which blends fading and photograph. Charles Dickens is famous for using portmanteau in coining characters’ names. In his novel “Bleak house”, there is a character of a stout attorney called Mr. Tulkinghorn, where talking is a modification of bulking and horn suggesting an injurious nature. In the same novel, Dickens introduces Mr. Boythorn, blending boyhood and thorn, denoting his loud and harsh nature. Furthermore, Mr. Murdstone character in the novel “David Copperfield” is a blend of murder and stone that refers to his coldness. Finally, in “The Mystery of Edwin Drood” the name Crisparkle is a blending of Christian and sparkle, which denotes goodness and boy-like temperament of the character.

3.1. THE PROCESS OF PORTMANTEAU WORD FORMATION

Blending or portmanteau is one of many word formation processes that are recognized in English. Other forms are briefly explained in the Introduction. According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, portmanteau is a word or morpheme whose form and meaning are derived from blending of two or more distinct forms. The definition of portmanteau words is equated with blending by most linguists. Gries (2006: 533) defines blending as one of the most creative word-formation processes associating creative with ‘defying characterization by means of hard-and-fast productive rules’. Furthermore, Harley (2006: 101) describes the process of portmanteau or blending as clipping a couple of words and ‘smooshing’ them together to make a new word whose meaning is connected to the meanings of the originals. Overall, it can be concluded that Lewis Carroll’s definition “two meanings packed up in one word” (1887: 114), is equal to definition of modern linguists to date.

Upon examination and comparison to other word-formation processes, portmanteau is considered to be in the category of less productive or a minor-type process, denoting that affixation, as an example of a major-type process, produces a greater number of generated words than portmanteau. On the other hand, portmanteau or blending can be viewed as a highly productive process as far as variety of words created in the process is concerned as will be shown in the examples further in the paper. Blending, as defined above, involves combining two or more words together to form a new word including losses in the orthographic and phonological sense. Process in which the relationship between a derived word and its base is expressed by the lack of phonetic material in the derived word is called truncation (Plag, 2003: 116). Truncations are a common occurrence in the
process of blending, leading to both words in the blend to lose orthographic or phonetic material. It is not a general rule that all words in a blend undergo truncation. Carstairs-McCarthy (2002: 65) introduces examples of partial blends in which only one component is truncated such as talkathon (from talk and marathon) or cheeseburger (from cheese and hamburger). In both the examples first words of the blend, talk and cheese, are kept without truncation.

Blends are already defined as words that combine two or more words into one by process of deleting material from one or both of the source words (Plag, 2003: 122). The definition clearly states that the process involves fusing more words into one and based on that Plag (2003) introduces two different classes of blends:

1. Blends, type 1: breath + analyzer = breathalyzer
2. Blends, type 2: channel + tunnel = chunnel

In (1) we see type 1 blends in which the first element modifies the second. Thus, breathalyzer is a kind of analyzer not breath. Words presented in (2) denote type 2 blends that share properties of both elements. Therefore, chunnel is a tunnel which goes under a channel, but it can also denote a tunnel which is in some respect a channel. As far as regularity in portmanteau is concerned, it can be said that there is a generalization in the formation of blends resulting in the first part of the first element to be combined with the second part of the second element (Plag. 2003: 123). According to the author parts of the elements involved in blend formation can be formulated as A, B, C and D, resulting in the following formula:

(3) A B + C D = A D

Word brunch can be taken as an example for the formula in (3). As a result of this blend, constituent words breakfast and lunch both undergo truncation, i.e. loss of constituent morphemes, so morphemes A (br-) and D (-unch) blend into the word brunch. When it comes to the rule in (3) there is an exception, as with most of the rules. The word cyborg is made up of cybernetic and organism, so the formula in this process is as follows: A B + C D = A C (cyb-er-netic + org-anism = cyb-org). Plag refers to this as a varying exception to the pattern denoting that there are not many of such examples.

Another term introduced by Plag (2003) is null constituent representing a process rather different from truncation. Constituents in the formula presented in (3) might appear in the blend in their full form. Blend fanzine can be taken as an example. The blend element fan (corresponding to the A B part of the formula) proceeds to be blended in its full form without the loss of a constituent morpheme. Subsequently, constituent B in this sense can be said to be null.

As far as the size of the blend consisting of two words is concerned, Plag (2003) introduces a table which clearly shows the size of the blend measured in the number of syllables. The table shows examples counting the number of syllables in the words that form the blend, as well as the blend itself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Base words</th>
<th>Blend</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>CD</th>
<th>AD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boat + hotel</td>
<td>Boatel</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boot + hoist</td>
<td>Boost</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breakfast + lunch</td>
<td>Brunch</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>channel + tunnel</td>
<td>Chunnel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compressor + expander</td>
<td>Compander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat + sheep</td>
<td>Geep</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guess + estimate</td>
<td>Guesstimate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smoke + fog</td>
<td>Smog</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish + English</td>
<td>Spanglish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stagnation + inflation</td>
<td>Stagflation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. The size of blends, measured in syllables (Plag, 2003: 125)

When the above table is analysed measuring the number of syllables, it can be seen that size of most blends is the same as the two constituent words. However, if two base words are discrepant in relation to the size there is a pattern: namely, the blend has the size as the second element, which is evident in the example of boatel or guesstimate (Plag, 2003: 125).

All elements considered, it can be concluded that portmanteau word formation does follow a certain pattern when it comes to semantic, syntactic and prosodic restrictions. In other words, one cannot simply blend two words together in order to be innovative. Hence, the blend formation rule as well as the table of the size of syllables can be understood as a reason for which many portmanteau words did not remain in English vocabulary.
3.2. EXAMPLES OF PORTMANTEAU IN ENGLISH

As shown already, blends recurrently enter the English language vocabulary. There are various ways it can be established, either by way of writers popularising them, as can be seen in the case of Lewis Carroll, or by entering the vocabulary through the use in everyday discourse. Despite being put into fashion by Carroll, portmanteau was present in English before the writer coined the notion. Algeo (2010: 239) presents several examples of blend words occurring before the coinage of the term portmanteau, some of them dating as far back as the 14th century, such as hatel translated as nobleman, in the poem “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”, which is a blend of aţel (OE ‘noble’) and halej (OE ‘man’) (OE-Old English). Other examples appearing early in history, with their dates of earliest appearance given in Oxford English Dictionary, are flush (blending flash and gush) dating back to 1548, twirl (from twist and whirl), 1598; dumfound (blending dumb and confound), 1653; and flurry (from flutter and hurry) 1698. In addition, examples of the mentioned words can be found in contemporary discourse as well, providing evidence that some portmanteaus are deeply rooted in the English language.

Nonetheless, as far as contemporary communication is concerned, some portmanteau words are established in the vocabulary of English so profoundly that closer analysis is needed to recognize them as blend words. The most successful examples according to Algeo (2010) are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>snog</th>
<th>blending smoke and fog</th>
<th>motel</th>
<th>motor and hotel</th>
<th>urinalysis</th>
<th>blend of urine and analysis</th>
<th>brunch</th>
<th>blending breakfast and lunch</th>
<th>quasar</th>
<th>quasi and stellar</th>
<th>fanzine</th>
<th>blend of fan and magazine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As it can be seen from the sections so far, there appear to be numerous manners of portmanteaus being coined. Some of these words are deliberate inventions of various authors, while others became frequently used through the popularisation of contemporary media, such as the Internet. Recent examples of modern use of portmanteau are Chimerica, used to describe the mutually supporting relationship between the People’s Republic of China and the United States of America, as well as feminazi, blending the terms feminist and Nazi to represent passionate promoters of this form of social philosophy (Veale and Butnariu, 2010). Furthermore, additional examples of modern formation of portmanteau are found on the web page of The Washington Post, more specifically the ‘Style Invitational’ section of the page. A portmanteau contest challenges readers to create the funniest new blend where the challenge is to coin a new word by adding, changing or deleting some letters of existing words. Here are the first four runners up as well as the winner of the contest from 2002, respectively: 

**Eupheminality** – the attribute that compels women to go to the restroom in pairs

**Mulligangster** – one’s “niece”

**Nazionist** – one truly mixed-up SOB

**Rhinoplastirisk** – a hit man who is afforded a second shot when his first is not successful

Generally speaking, portmanteau words represent a creative manner of word formation which occurs in almost all spheres of everyday language. They have an advantage of being novel providing them with infinite combination possibilities. All of the examples of portmanteau words are taken from several sources which are listed in the References section, while the following categories also illustrate the popularity of portmanteau words in various spheres of everyday lives.

**Portmanteau in art and entertainment:**
- Britcom – from British and comedy
- Cosplay – from costume and play
- Californication – from California and fornication
- Sitcom – from situation and comedy
- Fanzine – from fan and magazine

**Portmanteau words in technology:**
- Avionics – from aviation and electronics
- Breathalyser – from breath and analyzer
- Camcorder – from camera and recorder
- Electrocute – from electronics and execute
- Intercom – from internal and communication

**Portmanteau words in animal crossbreeding:**
- Liger – from lion and tiger
- Tigon – from tiger and lion
- Zedonk – from zebra (male) and donkey (female)
- Zonkey – from zebra (female) and donkey (male)
- Labradoodle – from Labrador retriever and Poodle

**Portmanteau words are popular in the domain of cuisine:**
- Brunch – from breakfast and lunch
- Cronut – from croissant and doughnut

**Portmanteau in science:**
- Botox – from botulism and toxin
- Cyborg – from cybernetic and organism
Finally, portmanteau became popular in celebrity couples name blends:

- **Bennifer** – from blending Ben (Affleck) and Jennifer (Lopez)
- **TomKat** – from Tom (Cruise) and Katie (Holmes)
- **Brangelina** – from Brad (Pitt) and Angelina (Jolie)
- **Kimye** – from Kim (Kardashian) and Kanye (West)

### 3.3. ANALYSIS OF PORTMANTEAU WORDS

The following examples of portmanteaus are analysed in more detail using Plag’s (2003) pattern for blend formation mentioned in previous chapters. The total of ten portmanteau words undergoes analysis denoting, if present, null constituent, while truncated morpheme is crossed out. In addition, the definition of the word is noted as well.

1. **emoticon**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow C \text{ is null}; \text{a group of keyboard characters that are used to represent a facial expression (such as a smile or frown).} \]

2. **chillax**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow B \text{ is null}; \text{to calm down.} \]

3. **hazmat**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ C; \text{a material (as flammable or poisonous) that would be danger to life or to the environment if released without precautions.} \]

4. **boost**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow B \text{ is null}; \text{to push or shove (something or someone) up from below.} \]

5. **fanzine**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow B \text{ is null}; \text{a magazine that is written by and for people who are fans of a particular person, group, etc.} \]

6. **cyborg**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ C; \text{a film or television programme that has the form of a serious documentary about a subject but is intended to make jokes about it and make it look silly.} \]

7. **quasar**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow C \text{ is null}; \text{a very bright object in space that is similar to a star and that is very far away from the Earth and gives off powerful radio waves.} \]

8. **seascape**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow B \text{ is null}; \text{a picture representing a scene at sea or a view of the sea.} \]

9. **Botox**
   - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ C; \text{a substance that can be injected into someone’s face to make the muscles relax and the skin look smoother and younger.} \]

10. **cosplay**
    - Rule of formation: 
     
     \[ A \ B + C \ D = A \ D \rightarrow C \text{ is null}; \text{an activity in which people dress up as characters from books or films, often acting out role plays.} \]

Detailed analysis of the results of examples shows that five out of ten examples of blend have null constituents. Furthermore, three examples pertain to the exception to Plag’s rule, whereas seven examples undergo A D blending.

### 4. PORTMANTEAU IN BOSNIAN/CROATIAN/SERBIAN LANGUAGE

As noted in the preceding sections, portmanteau word blending is not solely a property of the English language. In the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language, a grammar process similar to one of portmanteau word creation is known as “srastanje” (Jahić, Halilović, Palić, 2000: 398). It is defined as word creation during which at least two base words, that completely retain their morphological structure, blend into one. Thus, a word coined in that manner is called “sraslica”. Examples of such words are: dangubiti, kalcijkarbonat, kućevlasnica, takozvani, odmalena, navrh, crvenperka, etc. Upon closer examination of these examples, it can be noted that constituents of the blend appearing in the formation do not undergo truncation, that is, all words are constructed with null constituents. Apart from the examples coined in this language, there is also the word **smog** which is borrowed from English.

### 5. CONCLUSION

Portmanteaux represent an active means of coining new words as well as introducing them into vocabulary in numerous ways. The paper clearly shows that this is achieved in literature, various aspects of modern life, as
well as simple online competitions, or communication in general. Furthermore, creating them is not solely in the domain of linguists but everyday speakers as well. Their functionality, together with their popularity and novelty, keeps them actively present in daily discourse. Portmanteau simply serves as an example to show just how people can be imaginative and inventive when it comes to their language. In summary, language (especially English), is indeed a living organism, and owing to the fact that the world around us changes so rapidly we can conclude that there will be even more new, perhaps fashionable and entertaining, words in the future to come.

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