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Philological Readings

**SYNCRETISM IN WORD-BUILDING AS LANGUAGE ECONOMY
PRINCIPLE EMBODIMENT**

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Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of syncretism in word-building and focuses on the group of blends which includes pure lexical blends, hybrid (bilingual) blends and phrasal blends. This productive way of word creation is treated in the spotlight of linguistic economy principle. The author claims that producing blended structures as well as using them in speech follows the line of the least effort. The analysis is built upon the database of blends as well as other novel lexical units compiled and posted on Internet site www.wordspy.com by Paul McFedries. The research has been based upon component and distribution analysis; it also takes into account a cognitive approach to language units study. In case of blending base words are cumulated together both in their structure and meaning to produce an extraordinary lexeme with additional connotations and various functions. The paper presents numerous examples of blends, analyzed and classified according to their semantic, structural and phonetic properties. Syncretism in word-building manifests itself in production of lexical units with untypical content and surface structure that are getting widely-spread among language users. Synthesis of their elements is so efficient that the resulting lexical element is generally perceived by the speakers of the given language as an indivisible unit which also contributes to their popularity though may provoke misunderstanding.

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1. Introduction

The term “syncretism” dates back to early 17th century and originates from Greek *sunkrētismos*, from *sun-* ‘together’ + *krēs* ‘Cretan’ (originally with reference to ancient Cretan communities), as Oxford Dictionary (2019) says. In a general sense syncretism is defined as integration of various elements that may occur in different spheres, such as art, religion, philosophy, etc. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2019), syncretism in society is synonymic to cultural fusion, while religious syncretism is treated as the fusion of diverse religious beliefs and practices, such as, for example, Gnosticism.

However, we focus on linguistic syncretism that presupposes synthesis of differential structural and semantic language units which are opposed to each other within the language system and are connected through transitivity (Yartseva, 2002). Pott is generally acknowledged with introducing this term into linguistics in the meaning of the diachronic collapse of originally distinct inflectional forms, either through merger of the forms, or through the merger of their underlying functions (as cited in Baerman, Brown, & Corbett, 2005).

Synthesis in language may be observed on the level of grammar forms and syntactic structures; Baerman et al. (2005) define the phenomenon as a spectrum of morphology-syntax interaction involving loss of feature distinctions and study inflectional syncretism, presenting a typology of its occurrence across a wide range of languages.

But we claim that syncretism may also be observed in the process of word-building when base words are cumulated together both structurally and semantically to produce unique lexemes. This phenomenon is brightly manifested by blends which are constructed through overlap of semantic and formal base components. The following blends may serve as examples that demonstrate mental spaces overlap resulting in an integrated metaphoric form:

procrastibaking < *procrastinate* + *baking*, *putting off an important or urgent task by baking*;

narb < *narrative* + *bit*, *an item of personal information posted online, particularly as it contributes, often unwittingly, to a personal narrative that individual is creating online* (McFedries, 2019).

Thus blending, though considered a peripheral way of word-building, constitutes relevant examples to prove that syncretism works not only on grammar and syntax levels but also on the level of word creation. While morphology-syntax syncretism leads to much ambiguity in forms and meaning, word-building syncretism is primarily characterized by the notion of economy.

2. Problem Statement

The principle of linguistic economy has provided the basis and value for numerous research which study the language material from various viewpoints. Here belong works by Joseph Vendryes, Paul Passy, Henry Sweet, Henri Frei, Werner Leopold, André Martinet, George Kingsley Zipf (as cited in Vicentini, 2003). The given concept operates in accordance with the so called least effort principle when a language speaker is either consciously or subconsciously eager to save their energy while using language means. This principle works on phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactical levels and presupposes brevity of expression, consolidation of form and content and overall control of language material.

3. Research Questions

Here we focus in detail upon several lexical groups that follow the principle of linguistic economy and demonstrate syncretism features both in their planes of expression and content. These groups include lexical blends pure, hybrid bilingual blends and phrasal blends.

3.1. Lexical blends

Blending is a special way of word-building which incorporates two or more language units either having been clipped and glued together or possessing identical elements in their structure and joined through overlapping (Hrushcheva, 2011).

Blends are frequently monosyllabic and therefore perceived by native speakers and language learners as indivisible common words. Their semantics is normally understood contextually or intuitively, though misunderstanding may occur while coming across certain examples of such. Classic examples of pure lexical blends of the described type may include the following lexemes:

brunch < *breakfast* + *lunch*, a second meal between breakfast and lunch;

smog < *smoke* + *fog*, a polluted mixture of smoke and fog;

grice < *grime* + *ice*, mixture of muddy snow and ice;

sneet < *snow* + *sleet*, a mixture of rain and snow;

snirt < *snow* + *dirt*, muddy snow.

The examples listed above prove that blending refers to linguistic synthesis and follows the principle of the least effort thanks to economical structural pattern and bright cognitive model when two notions join together though stay recognizable.

Language synthesis and economy are also observed in the following lexical blends which are characterized by attributive relations, either exocentric or endocentric by their nature:

armlace < *arm* + *necklace*, a piece of jewellery worn on one's arm(s);

tomorning < *tomorrow* + *morning*;

psceterian < *pesce* + *vegetarian*, a person who adds fish to their vegetarian diet;

Denglish < *Deutsch* + *English*, a mixture of German and English words in speech or texts.

3.2. Hybrid blends

Hybrid blends which are constructed through integration of two language systems also provide examples for the case of syncretism. Most lexical units of the named type are functioning in the advertising sphere where their main purpose is to attract the target audience's attention. For instance, Russian beer manufacturer Tuborg Green used hybrid blends in its ads incorporating Russian and English lexemes:

Greenдиозно < *green* + *грандиозно*;

Вечегreenка < *green* + *вечеринка*.

Units of similar type are widely spread in slogans of other trading companies:

ОтмeCHEETOSные новости < *отменные* + *Cheetos*;

ПохрусTEAM < *похрустим* + *team*;

GOURмама < *gourmand* + *мама*.

Such lexemes are produced through conceptual integration, when two initial mental spaces are interacting and projecting their structures onto a newly constructed mental space which is characterized by compact structure and concise content (Turner & Fauconnier, 1995). Moreover the semantics of hybrid blends is deducible to neither of its constituent spaces, nor to their totality, but it combines their features and thus becomes unique.

3.3. Phrasal blends

In addition to pure lexical blends and hybrid bilingual blends the English language tends to produce blended lexemes of a special type. Their characteristic feature lies within their base words which are represented not by common integral lexemes but by language units of higher hierarchical levels, such as word combinations, phrases and sentences. These are so called phrasal blends and in the process of their creation base components are alloyed together (Dimmendaal's (2015) term) into an integral lexeme which structurally corresponds to its base elements (their morphemes, affixes or other constituent parts) and semantically reflects their meaning either in the direct or figurative way. Phrasal blends enter both oral and written speech, and possess expressive, emotional and often comic connotations.

Some early examples of phrasal blends were created by Carroll (2014) in his famous poem Jabberwocky: 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Didgy reand gimble in the wabe. Though the poem contains a number of blends, we will focus on the lexeme *wabe* which in spite of its monosyllabic structure is based upon a whole sentence. Humpty Dumpty provides its explanation to Alice in the following abstract:

«And «the wabe» is the grass-plot round a sundial, I suppose?» said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.

«Of course it is. It's called «wabe», you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it – »

«And a long way beyond it on each side», Alice added (Carroll, 2014).

Language units of similar morphological type frequently make a part of classic English jokes:

Knock, knock

Who's there?

Lettuce.

Lettuce who?

Lettuce in and you'll find out.

Knock, knock

Who's there?

Yula.

Yula who?

You'll apologize for not letting me in straight away.

The poems cited above contain phrasal blends *lettuce* and *yula* whose nature and structure are revealed in the final lines of the jokes where the whole base components are given.

Certain examples of phrasal blends have been the part of the English vocabulary for many decades, for instance, *Good-bye*. Etymological analysis shows that the structure of this everyday word is represented by a phrase: *goodbye* < *goodday (night) + Godbuy (save) you*, либо вариант *God be with ye*.

Present-day phrasal blends may be attributed to slang or jargon as they are frequently used by language speakers to substitute neutral words with their rude or obscene equivalents and thus sound expressive or humorous. Phrasal blends belonging to this category may be classified in the following groups:

1) people of negative image:

gofer < *go for* ..., *a person who performs other people's errands*;

tofu < *total fool*;

2) goods with negative characteristics (old, cheap, ugly, faulty items):

couldja house < *could you love me enough to live in it?*, *an old house which is no good to live in*;

musgos < *must go*, *expired goods* (examples listed in Dickson, 1998).

Phrasal blends, as we see by the examples listed above, embody various language principles but mainly manifest language speakers' effort to express themselves economically and vividly.

4. Purpose of the Study

The research carried out herein is aimed at considering the notions of linguistic syncretism and linguistic economy, and principally making an attempt to verify the hypothesis that certain ways of word-building in English reflect the aforementioned phenomena and follow their principles. Thus, lexical blending has become the focus of our attention as its derivatives demonstrate brevity of both planes of content and expression saving language speakers' effort to create and employ the necessary linguistic means.

5. Research Methods

The research has been based upon basic general scientific methods such as statistical analysis, classification and description of the studied phenomena, as well as special linguistic methods like component and distribution analysis, contextual and cognitive approaches.

6. Findings

Blending, though considered a peripheral way of word-building producing occasional words for the purpose of self-expression or literary works, currently constitutes a considerable portion of vocabulary stock in English. Undoubtedly it concerns first of all a group of neologisms; for instance, McFedries' (2019) online database presents most recent English blends and they make 85% of the whole corpora. The fact proves that language speakers tend to create new lexemes on the basis of this pattern and thus demonstrate their desire to sound innovative, expressive, but simultaneously economical.

Phrasal blends may come into common usage due to their homophony, as they are frequently identical in their phonetic properties to other everyday words (14% of the total number). The following examples may demonstrate this characteristic feature of phrasal blends:

canard<*canhard*(ly)...– *hardly suitable\applicable and canard – rumour; a model of a plane;*
gofer/gopher<*gofor*...– *someone who performs other people's errands and gopher–a small animal;*
tofu<*total fool and tofu – soya cheese.*

7. Conclusion

The conducted study and the examples analysed herein have shown that our hypothesis concerning syncretism to be observed on the level of word-building has proved right and thus we may claim that lexical blending in its variety of subtypes demonstrate the tendency for linguistic economy and synthesis of structure and content. Blend creation follows a number of principles which regulate the order of the base elements in the derived structure, the number of syllables and the point(s) of their junction. Besides there are certain requirements which are necessary to be observed while blend creation, for instance, integrity of the derived lexeme and its semantic transparency. In case a language user takes into account the enumerated factors, they may master blend creation and comprehension in order to ensure effective communication, to find a way for self-expression and linguistic creativity with the minimum effort.

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