S. Y. Filonik,
University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF LEXICAL BLENDING

In this paper, I review literature on lexical blending, focusing on a number of controversial issues. I propose arguments for or against some of the claims considered and introduce my definition of lexical blends.
Key words: *blending, word-formation, clipping, compounding*

У даній статті проведено огляд літературних джерел, присвячених лексичному блендингу, а саме деяких дискусійних питань з даної теми. Ми пропонуємо аргументи за та проти деяких аналізованих у роботі тверджень та подаємо своє визначення лексичних блендів.
Ключові слова: *блендинг, словотвір, усічення, основоскладання*

В данной статье проводится обзор литературных источников, посвященных лексическому блендингу, а именно некоторых дискуссионных вопросов по данной теме. Мы приводим аргументы за и против анализируемых в работе утверждений и предлагаем свое определение лексических блендов.
Ключевые слова: *блендинг, словообразование, усечение, основосложение*

1. Introduction

There is little agreement in the literature on the definition of lexical blends. Most treatments of the phenomenon considered converge on a definition of blends as words formed by combining two or more words which may have been clipped. In this paper, I intend to provide some insights into the nature of blends. Thus, the goals of this paper are (i) to provide arguments for or against some points of contention encountered in the literature on lexical blending, and (ii) to formulate my own definition of a blend. Establishing an exhaustive definition of a blend is essential, since it will advance research on blending by enabling the linguists who adopt it to focus on a more narrowly-defined set of linguistic phenomena.

For clarity it is necessary to start by defining some of the key terms used in the context of discussions on blending. First, the words which form a blend are referred to as SOURCE WORDS (SW) in this paper (see also Gries [2004], Lehrer [2007], Brdar-Szabó & Brdar [2008]). Second, I will refer to the fragments of the clipped SWs as SPLINTERS (see also Lehrer [2007] and Ronneberger-Sibold [2012]).

Below, I will discuss the following aspects of blending: segmental overlap of SWs or splinters, clipping of SWs, relation of blending to compounding, and neoclassical elements in blends. All these aspects to a different degree cause some disagreement among linguists attempting to define blending; thus, the discussion thereof is essential for formulating my own definition of blends.

2. Segmental overlap of SWs or splinters

Words formed by two or more SWs with a homophonic overlapping sequence are blends. For example, the words *fling* and *linguist* share the homophonic sequence /lɪŋ/. As demonstrated in (1), a blend derived from these SWs has *ling* as an overlapping sequence.

(1) fli<u>ling</u>uist < **fling linguist**[1]
(a member of an Ultimate Frisbee team formed by linguists)

Words like those in (1) are identified as blends both in early works on blending (see Bergström [1906], Wood [1911], and others) and in more up-to-date analyses of blends. However, to my knowledge, there is one exception in the contemporary literature. Namely, Ralli & Xydopoulos [2012] do not consider words involving segmental overlap as blends. In their analysis of Modern Greek blends, Ralli & Xydopoulos [2012:35] consider a word as a blend only if no SW used for deriving it remains intact. Unlike a number of linguists who view words like *flinguist* in (1) above as preserving both SWs intact (Plag [2003], Bat-El [2006], and Konieczna [2012]), Ralli & Xydopoulos [2012: 46] claim that one of the SWs in examples like that in (1) is clipped via haplology. The logical question is: if one accepts Ralli & Xydopoulos' [2012] formal requirements to blends, should one consider the French example in (2) below as a blend?

(2) a. franglais < **fran**çais an**glais**
b. franglais < **fr**ançais **anglais**
'Frenglish' 'French' 'English'

---

[1] In this paper, I underline the overlap in blends and put the parts of the source words which form a blend in bold type.

It can be postulated that the SW *français* is clipped to the remaining splinter *fran•²*, while the SW *anglais* is clipped via haplology to the splinter *•glais* (see (2a)). Accepting this postulation would mean recognizing *franglais* as a blend. Alternatively, one can view *français* as being clipped to *fr•* and *anglais* as remaining intact (see (2b)), in which case *franglais* would not be considered as a blend.³ Thus, the claim that words which demonstrate the overlap of homophonous sequences always involve clipping is problematic, as it is not clear which of the SWs is clipped.

 Another logical question is: how do Ralli & Xydopoulos [2012] classify words like *flinguist* in (1) or their own Modern Greek example repeated in (3)? I assume that they view such words as clipped compounds, since they claim that such words «are built in accordance with the compounding processes, but are reduced via haplology» [Ralli & Xydopoulos 2012:46].

(3) panoleθriamvos < panoleθria θriamvos
'disaster and truimph' 'disaster' 'triumph'
[(15b) in Ralli & Xydopoulos 2012:46]

I will discuss the criteria I use for discriminating between blends and (clipped) compounds further in this section. For now it should suffice to say that those criteria are not limited to formal characteristics of splinters. For example, I support Plag's [2003:121] claim that clipped compounds are simply a shortened form of existing compounds. For example, the use of the English clipped compound in (4) is paralleled by the use of the corresponding non-clipped compound *science fiction*. Since, as far as I know, there are no corresponding non-clipped compounds to the examples in (1) and (3), I conclude that they should not be considered as clipped compounds.

(4) sci-fi < **sci**ence **fi**ction

Bauer [2012:19] claims that some blends are more prototypical than others. If this is true, blends involving segmental overlap are perhaps the most prototypical of all blends. It seems that blends with segmental overlap are the best compromise between two competing goals pursued when forming a blend: to truncate the SWs in order to allow the blend to have the length of a single word, on the one hand, and to preserve the maximum number of segments of the SWs in order to increase semantic transparency of the blend, on the other hand [Ronneberger-Sibold 2012].

3. Clipping of SWs

That words formed by combining the first part of the SW_1 and the second part of the SW_2 are blends is generally agreed upon in the literature (Bergström [1906], Wood [1911], Plag [2003], Gries [2004], and Bat-El [2006]). Plag [2003:123] formulates the following blending rule, with A, B, C, and D referring to the respective parts of the elements involved: $AB + CD \rightarrow AD$. Different variations of this rule are possible.

Potentially, we can identify words with the structure ABD and ACD as blends. Words of the ABD type occur much less frequently than those of the ACD type, which presumably is linked to the blends' recognisability. Bauer [2012:13] claims that recognisability is easier for word beginnings than for endings. Thus, when forming blends one would be more likely to clip more segments of the SW_1 than the SW_2 [Gries 2004:654, and Bauer 2012:13]. In this paper, I view the relatively rare examples of ABD words, e.g. (5), as blends.

(5) wintertainment < **winter** e**ntertainment**
[Lehrer 2007:117]

However, all the numerous ACD type words I have encountered are reduced compounds (I will eleborate on this in section 4).

One could also consider configurations of the BD and AC type as blends. However, I have only come across one example of a blend formed by final splinters of the SWs (see the English example in (6)), which was pointed out to me by A. Pounder [personal communication, 6 August 2013].

(6) Sippi-see-kansas < Missis**sippi** Tennes**see** Ar**kansas**
[Hanson 2010]

Thus, I assume that even if blends formed by final segments of SWs appear in a language, they must be very rare, which is in tune with Bauer's [2012] observation regarding recognisability mentioned above. In (6), recognisability can be attributed to the uniqueness of the geographical names. As for the words of the AC type, they are common. However, they are normally viewed as reduced compounds (see section 4).

4. Relation of blending to compounding

Although compounding and blending share some characteristics, I will follow many linguists (e.g. Bat-El [2006], Xruščeva [2011], Gries [2004], and others) in arguing that they are two separate types of word-formation, so that blends are not a subtype of compounds (as argued, for example, by Lehrer [2007] and Arcodia & Montermini [2012]). Below, I will provide some arguments to support my claim.

---

² Following Bat-El [2006], I will use the symbol • to mark the edge of the splinter from which certain phonological material has been clipped.

³ The latter clipping pattern is possible, since a SW can be clipped on the border of syllable constituents, e.g. an onset and a rhyme [Plag 2003: 123–124, Bat-El 2006: 69, Xruščeva 2011: 50-51, and Bauer 2012: 17], and there is a tendency to preserve more segments of the rightmost SW, compared to the leftmost one [Bauer 2012: 13; Gries 2004:654].

The most obvious characteristic shared by blends and compounds is that they combine two or more words into one. However, the compounding operations which result in forming blends are different from those which result in forming compound words. Firstly, the possible combinations of the formal, semantic, and syntactic rules which trigger the formation of blends are different from the combinations of the rules which produce compounds. For example, while the syntactic rule combining a noun and a verb can be combined with a formal rule of compounding in the formation of a Ukrainian blend, such a combination cannot produce a Ukrainian compound. Additionally, the compounding of the SWs into a blend may involve the overlap of the homophonous sequences, which does not happen in the formation of compounds. What is more, a compounding operation can be applied subsequently to the process of clipping of the inner edges of the SWs in forming blends, but not compounds. The assumption that the operations of compounding and clipping are applied when forming blends explains the observation that languages exhibiting more compounding and clipping are more likely to have many blends [Brdar-Szabó & Brdar 2008:183]. It should also be observed that an obligatory application of the compounding operation is not exclusive to formation of blends (consider, for example, reduplication).

Another similarity between compounds and blends is their headedness: both blends and compounds can be either headed (endocentric) or non-headed (i.e. exocentric). However, the difference between blends and compounds with respect to this characteristic is emphasized by Bat-El [2006]. In some languages, endocentric compounds demonstrate a fixed order of the head and the modifier, while blends do not. For example, both in French and Hebrew compounds are strictly left-headed, but blends can be either right- or left-headed [Bat-El 2006:67, Arcodia & Montermini 2012:94–95]. This can be illustrated by the left-headed French example in (7a) and the right-headed French example in (7b), where the heads are italicised.

(7) a. *nostalg*érie < **nostalg**ie **Algérie**
‘nostalgia for Algeria’ ‘nostalgia’ ‘Algeria’
b. mus*ictionnaire* < **musique** d**ictionnaire**
‘music dictionary’ ‘music’ ‘dictionary’
[(2b) in Arcodia & Montermini 2012:95]

An additional argument in favour of a close relation between blends and compounds is that the constraints on the lexical categories which can be combined to form a word apply both to blends and compounds in a given language. However, as discussed above in this section, some linguists note that blends are more permissive than compounds: they may allow combinations of syntactic categories that do not appear in compounds [Bat-El 2006:67, Arcodia & Montermini 2012:95]. For example, while in French Verb+Verb compounds are ungrammatical, blends do display this «illegal» category combination, as Arcodia & Montermini [2012] put it, as in (8).

(8) pleurire < **pleur**er **rire**
‘cry and laugh’ ‘cry’ ‘laugh’
[Arcodia & Montermini 2012:95]

The claim that blending and compounding are two different types of word-formation can also be supported by the difference in phonological complexity of blends and compounds. Unlike compounds, blends can be subject to stem-level phonological processes, which leads me to conclude that there is no prosodic word boundary between the splinters of a blend. For example, as pointed out to me by D. Flynn [personal communication, 26 Nov. 2013], Canadian raising takes place in the blend in (9a), but not in the compound in (9b). Presumably, the prosodic word boundary between the constituents of the compound in (9b) separates the diphthong target from the voiceless consonant trigger, therefore blocking Canadian raising. On the other hand, the absence of the prosodic word boundary between the splinters of the English blend in (9) allows for Canadian raising to take place.

(9) a. nichrome < **ni**ckel[4] **chrome**
b. bi-chrome

Finally, words formed by two initial splinters, like the Ukrainian example in (10) below, are occasionally referred to as blends in the literature [Borgwaldt et al. 2012, Konieczna 2012, Ronneberger-Sibold 2012].

(10) mexmat < **mex**aniko-**mat**ematyčnyj (fakul’tet)
‘Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics’ ‘mechanic’ ‘mathematic’ ‘faculty’

However, I argue that they are reduced compounds, as opposed to blends. This is in tune with the primary works in which the term «blending» was established [Bergström 1906, Wood 1911 and others]. Bat-El [2006:66] also asserts that such structures, as well as words in which only the first SW undergoes truncation, are characteristic of clipped compounds [Bat-El 2006:66]. Importantly, to my knowledge such words tend to have existing non-reduced compound correspondents [Plag 2003:121]. However, it is fair to say that if a word of the ACD type satisfies all our requirements for blends and does not have a corresponding full compound, it can be considered as a blend.

---

[4] Crucially, the diphthong is only used in the blend, the SW1 being pronounced with /ɪ/.

5. Neoclassical elements in blends

Neoclassical elements are lexemes originally borrowed from Latin or Greek, whose combinations are of modern origin, e.g. *bio-* in (11a) and *photo-* in (11b) [Plag 2003].

(11) a. *bio*chemistry
b. *photo*graph
[Plag 2003:74]

Such elements have a questionable status in word-formation because they exhibit features of both affixes and roots. It is important for us to decide what status to assign to such elements for the following reason. On the one hand, if we consider *orto-* in (12) as an affix, then the Ukrainian word *orto-dushka* is an affixed clipping. On the other hand, if we view it as a root, then *orto-dushka* is a blend. In this paper, I will consider neoclassical elements as bound roots for reasons outlined below.

(12) ortodushka < **orto**- po**dushka**
'ortho-pillow' 'ortho-' 'pillow'

On the one hand, it is true that neoclassical elements share some properties with affixes: they have a stable position, e.g. *narco-* is word-initial and *-holic* is word-final [Konieczna 2012:65], and they can only be used as bound morphemes. On the one hand, firstly, as Konieczna [2012: 65] points out, they preserve lexical meaning, rather than acquiring more general meaning, like affixes (e.g. *narco-* and *-holic* mean 'drug' and 'addicted to', respectively). Moreover, in certain cases neoclassical elements can be attached not only to words, but also to other neoclassical elements, as in (13). Considering the neoclassical elements in (13) as affixes would undermine the basic assumptions about the general structure of words [Plag 2003].

(13) *ecology < eco- -logy*

Finally, Plag [2003: 174] notes that words formed by combining a neoclassical element with a base behave exactly like compounds formed on the basis of native words: for example, a kitchen sink is a kind of sink, while biochemistry is a kind of chemistry. The only difference between neoclassical forms and native compounds is that the non-native elements are obligatorily bound.

Assigning neoclassical elements the status of a bound root allows me to consider the Ukrainian example in (14) as a compound and the Ukrainian examples in (15a,b) as blends. In (14), the bound root is combined with a full (as opposed to clipped) base. In (15a) it is combined with a fore-clipped SW, i.e. the splinter *dushka*, while in (15b), there is a segmental overlap of the neoclassical element and the SW.

(14) orto-poduška
'ortho pillow'

(15) a. ortoduška < **orto**- po**duška**
'ortho pillow' 'ortho-' 'pillow'
b. a<u>kvas</u> < **akva kvas**
'kvas diluted with water' 'aqua' 'kvas'

Based on all the argumentation provided above, I can now propose a definition of blends. Thus, a blend is a word formed by merging two or more SWs. Such merging of the SWs must involve either clipping of their inner edges or an overlap of the SWs' fragments due to their homophonicity.

6. Conclusion

There is no agreement in the literature on the exact delimitation of the concept of lexical blending. Therefore, there is a need to shed some light onto the essense of a lexical blend. Without having a comprehensive defintion of blends, linguists run the risk of making weak or even incorrect generalisations regarding the ill-defined sets of words considered in their works.

The arguments which I presented in this paper lead to a more accurate description of the phenomenon of lexical blending. My analysis enables one to exclude certain formations from the group of words referred to as blends. For example, I argued for differentiating between blends and reduced compounds. More generally, I argued against the assumption that blends are a sub-type of compounds. Additionally, I challenged the claim that words involving segmental overlap should not be viewed as blends. Finally, I gave reasons in support of the claim that neoclassical elements are bound roots, which allows one to consider words composed of splinters and neoclassical elements as blends. The exhaustive definition of blends presented here is significant, since having adopted it, an analyst of blending can focus on studying more specific questions regarding this type of word-formation.

References:
1. Arcodia, G. & F. Montermini. 2012. Are reduced compounds compounds? Morphological and prosodic properties of reduced compounds in Russian and Mandarin Chinese. In Renner, V., F. Maniez & P. Arnaud (eds.), Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending, 93-115. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

2. Bat-El, O. 2006. Blend. In Brown, K. (ed.), Encyclopedia of language and linguistics, 2nd edn., vol. 2, 66-70. – Amsterdam : Elsevier.

3. Bauer, L. 2012. Blends: Core and periphery. In Renner, V., F. Maniez & P. Arnaud (eds.), Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending, 11–23. – Berlin : Mouton de Gruyter.

4. Bergström, G. 1906. On blendings of synonymous or cognate expressions in English. – Lund : Publisher H. Ohlson.

5. Brdar-Szabó, R. & M. Brdar. 2008. On the marginality of lexical blending. Jezikoslovije 9(1-2). 171-194.

6. Gries, S. 2004. Some characteristics of English morphological blends. In Andronis, M., E. Debenport, A. Pycha, and K. Yoshimura (eds.). – Chicago Linguistics Society. 201-216.

7. Hanson, D. 2010. Clarksdale, MS: Super Chikan [video]. Retrieved from http://vimeo.com/8417259, Aug. 6, 2013.

8. Konieczna, E. 2012. Lexical blending in Polish: A result of the internationalisation of Slavic languages. In Renner, V., F. Maniez & P. Arnaud (eds.), Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending, 51–75. Berlin – Boston : Mouton de Gruyter.

9. Lehrer, A. 2007. Blendalicious. In Munat, J. (ed.), Lexical creativity, texts, and contexts, 115-133. – Amsterdam : Benjamins.

10. Plag, I. 2003. Word-formation in English. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

11. Ralli, A. & G. Xydopoulos 2012. Blend formation in Modern Greek. In Renner, V., F. Maniez & P. Arnaud (eds.), Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending, 35-51. – Berlin : Mouton de Gruyter.

13. Ronneberger-Sibold, E. 2012. Blending between grammar and universal cognitive principles. In Renner, V., F. Maniez & P. Arnaud (eds.), Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending, 115-143. – Berlin : Mouton de Gruyter.

14. Wood, F. 1911. Iteratives, Blends, and «Streckformen». Modern Philology 9(2). 157-194.

15. Xruščeva, O. 2011. Universal'nye i lingvokul'turnye osobennosti blendinga. – Čeljabinsk : Čeljabinsk State University PhD dissertation.