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## АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНЫЕ НЕОЛОГИЗМЫ-БЛЕНДЫ, ПОЯВИВШИЕСЯ ПОД ВЛИЯНИЕМ ПАНДЕМИИ COVID-19

Научная статья

Самигуллина А.Д. \*

ORCID: 0000-0002-8819-9805,

Московский государственный институт международных отношений (университет) Министерства иностранных дел Российской Федерации, Москва, Россия

\* Корреспондирующий автор (anna\_samigoullina[at]rambler.ru)

**Аннотация**

В 2020 году под влиянием пандемии коронавируса в английском языке появилось огромное количество неологизмов. Значительная их часть состоит из слов, образовавшихся в процессе лексической контаминации (блендинга), то есть слияния или наложения двух исходных лексем. Целью данной статьи является изучение англоязычных контаминантов (блендов), связанных с пандемией Ковид-19, и анализ их морфологической структуры. В статье представлены различные подходы к морфологической классификации подобных словообразований и проводится различие между процессами контаминации и словосложения.

Анализ морфологической структуры неологизмов, связанных с пандемией коронавируса, показал, что наиболее распространенными типами контаминантов (блендов) являются так называемые «бленды-матрешки», которые образуются путем вклинивания одного слова внутрь другого, а также частичные бленды, состоящие из основы первого слова и конечного элемента второго слова.

**Ключевые слова:** лексическая контаминация, бленд, блендинг, контаминант, словообразование, неологизм, ковид-19.

## A STUDY OF ENGLISH BLENDS RELATED TO COVID-19

Research article

Samigoullina A.D. \*

ORCID: 0000-0002-8819-9805,

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia

\* Corresponding author (anna\_samigoullina[at]rambler.ru)

**Abstract**

The year 2020 was characterized by an unprecedented number of neologism and coinages that appeared in the English language under the influence of the pandemic of Covid-19. A significant proportion of these coinages is made up of blends, that is, word formations that consist of two source lexemes which merge or overlap. This paper purports to describe the Covid-related blends in the English language and analyse their structure. The article presents different approaches to a morphological classification of blends and makes a distinction between blends and clipped compounds. The analysis of the morphological structure of Covid-related blends showed that among these lexical formations, substitution blends prevail over overlap blends; a common type of blending is combining the first source word in its entirety with the final splinter of the second source word.

**Keywords:** blend, portmanteau word, word formation, neologism, coinage, Covid-19.

**Introduction**

In early 2020, the world received news of the outbreak of a new virus. On February 11, Director-General of World Health Organization announced the name of the disease, *Covid-19*, containing blended parts of two lexemes, *coronavirus* and *disease*. The name of the virus appeared merely a month later in Merriam-Webster's online dictionary [11], the shortest time its lexicographers had ever formally recognized a word. According to Oxford English Dictionary (OED), the lexeme *Covid-19* was one of the top five most frequent nouns in the Oxford Monitor Corpus of English in April 2020, along with *people*, *time*, *year*, and *coronavirus* [13].

The upheaval of Covid-19 brought about the emergence of a vast number of neologisms in the English language. British linguist Tony Thorne compiled a list of Covid-related vocabulary; according to him, over 1,000 new coinages appeared in the English language since the outbreak of the pandemic [18]. A significant number of these neologisms, such as *covidiot*, *twindemic*, *anthropause*, are blends of two separate stems. This paper purports to describe and classify the Covid-related blends coined in the English language and analyse their structure.

**Data and methods**

Blends are lexemes combining a whole word and part of another word or parts of two words. Blends are sometimes referred to as '**portmanteau words**', a term invented by Ch. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) whose character Humpty Dumpty compares such words to a suitcase with two separate departments because "there are two meanings packed up into one word" [7]. The truncated component parts of the blended words are called **splinters** [3], [9] or **constituents** [10], [15], and the co-activated words themselves are referred to as **source lexemes**, since they are diachronically prior and synchronically more primary [8, P. 72].

In spite of plethora of research dedicated to blends, there is no consensual definition of this type of word formation. A particular formation may or may not be treated as a blend depending on the defining criteria a researcher utilizes to characterize blends. Many linguists adopt a rather broad approach to blends [4], [2], [9], [10]. According to Bauer, blending

occurs when ‘two words simply merge where they overlap, so no information is lost, but repetition of letter combinations is avoided’ [4, P. 46]; and Algeo defines a blend as “any combination of two (or more) etyma with omission of part of at least one etymon” [2, P. 76].

In contrast, Bat-El provides a far narrower outlook on blends: she maintains that blends must exhibit some sort of structural fusion, the byproduct of which is “the truncation of segmental material from the inner edges of the two words or only one of them” (specifically, the second) [3, P. 66]. Under this approach, *infodemic* (*information* + *epidemic*) and *drivecation* (*drive* + *vacation*) qualify as blends, because the inner edges of both source lexemes are truncated (*infodemic*), or the beginning of the second source lexeme is truncated (*drivecation*). In contrast, the forms in which the right edges of both words are truncated, such as *quarantech* (*quarantine* + *technology*), and forms in which only the first word undergoes truncation, e.g. *quaranteam* (*quarantine* + *team*) are not treated by Bat-El as blends; instead, she considers these forms to be ‘clipped’, or shortened, compounds [3, P. 66].

Instead of following Bat-El’s narrow approach, this paper considers blending to be a more extensive category that comprises a variety of lexemes, the distinguishing feature being the truncation of some linguistic (phonetic or orthographic) material from one or both source lexemes.

Using this criterion, we selected 73 formations related to Covid-19 that can be characterized as blends. The main sources of data were:

- Thorne’s website ‘Language and Culture’ [18], which contains a running list of Covid-related neologisms;
- the updates publicized by the OED containing words, sub-entries, and revisions that have been added to the Oxford English Dictionary in the months of 2020 [13];
- the special guide to coronavirus vocabulary published in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online [12];
- the Cambridge Dictionary Blog dedicated to neologisms [6];
- the Rice University Neologisms Database compiled by Kemmer [17];
- linguistic research dedicated to the topic [16].

### Results and Discussion

The principles employed by linguists in order to analyse the structure of blends and classify them vary considerably. For instance, Kemmer discriminates between **substitution blends**, which involve a replacement of part of one source lexeme with another whole lexeme, and **overlap blends**, which share some phonetic or orthographic material where the two source words merge [8, P. 73-74]. She believes it to be useful to distinguish substitution blends as a conceptually separate class, because the whole source lexeme that is used as a ‘replacement part’ serves a contrasting function and its full meaning is brought to the blend [8, P. 75].

One should note that in order for substitution blends to be transparent, the substitute source lexeme must be phonologically similar to the replacement part in the other source lexeme, for example, contain the same phoneme or combination of phonemes, or rhyme with the replacement part. For instance, in the substitution blend *anthropause* (*Anthropos* + *pause*), which means ‘global reduction in modern human activity’, the final combination of phonemes [pɔːs] is replaced by the word *pause* [pɔːz], diverging by one consonant sound. The blend *ronavation* (*rona* + *renovation*) meaning ‘renovation one starts during the lockdown’ the replacement part [ˌrenə] in *renovation* is substituted with *rona* [ˈrɒnə], the slang word for *corona*, which diverges by one vowel.

It should be noted that substitution blends constitute a clear majority among the English blends related to Covid-19: we found 46 **substitution blends**, which accounts for 63% of all the blends selected for the analysis. This list includes such blends as follows (the substitution part in one of the source lexemes is underlined):

- *blursday* (*blur* + *Thursday*): any day of the week during the lockdown because they all blur together;
- *cluttercore* (*clutter* + *normcore*): an aesthetic or decorating style that embraces clutter;
- *COVIDpreneur* (*COVID* + *entrepreneur*): a person or organization that exploits panic related to the Covid-19 pandemic by purchasing and reselling consumer goods;
- *homecation* (*home* + *vacation*): a holiday spent completely at home;
- *homeference* (*home* + *conference*): an online conference taken from home;
- *infits* (*in* + *outfit*): an outfit one wears while staying in;
- *inflammageing* (*inflammation* + *ageing*): aging caused by inflammation;
- *maskhole* (*mask* + *asshole*): an unwise person who refuses to wear a mask;
- *mockdown* (*mock* + *lockdown*): a half-hearted attempt to apply restrictions and rules to control the spread of Covid-19;
- *morona* (*corona* + *moron*): an unwise person who ignores or doesn’t understand the safety guidelines for preventing the spread of Covid-19;
- *quaranteam* (*quarantine* + *team*): a group of people who create a social circle during the Covid-19 pandemic, prohibiting interaction with others;
- *ronacoaster* (*rona*, slang for ‘corona’ + *rollercoaster*): a feeling, situation, or experience that changes very quickly during the pandemic;
- *schoolcation* (*school* + *vacation*): a family holiday during which the children receive online schooling;
- *shecession* (*she* + *recession*): an economic recession that affects mostly women;
- *smizing* (*smiling* + *eyes*): showing a smile by one’s eyes because one is wearing a face mask;
- *spendemic* (*spend* + *pandemic*): excessive spending during the pandemic;
- *twindemic* (*twin* + *epidemic*): situation in which influenza and a second Covid-19 spike could appear simultaneously, overwhelming hospitals;
- *walktail* (*walk* + *cocktail*): an alcoholic drink one drinks during a walk because of bar restrictions;
- *workation* (*work* + *vacation*): a holiday where you stay in a hotel or other accommodation and work from there;

— *zombie* (*zoom* + *zombie*): a person who is exhausted by endless Zoom conferences.

In case of **overlap blends**, the whole source words overlap so that both of them are preserved in their entirety, or splinters of the source words overlap where they are merged together (in this case, some linguistic material in truncated). This type of blends is substantially less common in the list of Covid-related English blends: we found 10 examples of overlap blends (13.7%), such as the following (the overlapping part is marked in bold):

- *coronapocalypse* (*corona* + *apocalypse*): extreme reactions to the outbreak of COVID-19;
- *coroneologism* (*corona* + *neologism*): a neologism that appeared during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- *coronial/coronnial* (*corona* + *millennial*): the new generation of children born during the Covid-19 pandemic;
- *covidiot* (*covid* + *idiot*): someone who unwisely disregards health and safety guidelines about Covid-19;
- *covidivorce* (*covid* + *divorce*): a divorce happening during (and often as a result of) the lockdown;
- *locktail* (*lockdown* + *cocktail*): a medicinal cocktail one drinks during the lockdown;
- *maskne* (*mask* + *acne*): acne or skin irritation that occurs on a person's face (especially on and around the nose and chin) from regularly wearing a face mask;
- *nakation* (*naked* + *vacation*): a type of holiday where people do not have to wear clothes most of the time;
- *phygital* (*physical* + *digital*): using a combination of physical and digital elements to sell and market a product;
- *quarantini* (*quarantine* + *martini*): a martini or other form of alcohol one drinks during the lockdown;
- *quaranzine* (*quarantine* + *magazine*): a collaborative, virtual magazine documenting people's life and thoughts during Covid-19;
- *zumping* (*zoom* + *dumping*): dumping someone in an online conference.

Although there is no doubt that Kemmer's classification is useful, it has some drawbacks. First, a few Covid-related blends (11% of the analysed lexemes) can be assigned to both substitution blends and overlap blends. For instance, one can argue that in *covidivorce* (*covid* + *divorce*), the initial syllable of the second source lexeme is substituted by a full source word *covid*, or that both source words are preserved in their entirety with an overlapping syllable *-vid-*.

Furthermore, a number of blends (8.2%) do not fall into either of the two categories. For example, in the blend *pancession* (*pandemic* + *recession*), meaning 'waning of the world's economies during the pandemic of Covid-19', the two source words are combined without an overlap (therefore, it does not qualify as an overlap blend) and neither of the splinters is a full word (thus, it is not a substitution blend). Other examples of blends that cannot be included into either category are *infodemic* (*information* + *epidemic*): rapid and far-reaching spread of both accurate and inaccurate information about Covid-19; *lockstalgia* (*lockdown* + *nostalgia*): a feeling of missing the lockdown when one goes back to work; *quarandating* (*quarantine* + *dating*): online dating during the pandemic.

This problem can be addressed by suggesting a more detailed classification of blends, for instance, one similar to the approach proposed to Lehrer [9, P. 591-592], discriminating between blends formed by the whole source words (W1 and W2) or their splinters, in different combinations; written down using the formula from Plag [15, P. 123].

### Type 1. AB (W1) + CD (W2) = AD

Blends of the first type consist of two splinters: the initial part of the first source lexeme and the final part of the second source lexeme. This type is most commonly recognized 'proper blends' [15] or 'prototypical blends' [5].

We found 16 blends of this type in the material under analysis (21.9%), including *boreout* (*boredom* + *burnout*), *coronopticon* (*corona* + *panopticon*), *infodemic* (*information* + *epidemic*), *locktail* (*lockdown* + *cocktail*), *loxit* (*lockdown* + *exit*), *phygital* (*physical* + *digital*), *techceleration* (*technology* + *acceleration*), *lockstalgia* (*lockdown* + *nostalgia*), *zumping* (*zoom* + *dumping*): the splinters of the two source words are underlined.

The splinters sometimes overlap, e.g. *coronial/coronnial* (*corona* + *millennial*): overlapping sound [n]), *quarantini* (*quarantine* + *martini*): overlapping combination [ti:n]), causing the blends to exhibit some sort of structural fusion; however, this is not an essential criterion, and splinters often they do not share any segmental material, as in *zumping* (*zoom* + *dumping*).

### Type 2. AB (W1) + CD (W2) = AC

This type of blend combines two initial splinters of two base words. In the list of Covid-related coinages, we found only two blends of this type (2.7%): *hyflex* (*hybrid* + *flexible*), meaning a way of learning in which lessons are given face to face in classrooms and also made available on the internet, and *quarantech* (*quarantine* + *technology*): the new technologies that appeared during the lockdown.

Because the combinations of these source lexemes were not attested before the Covid-19 pandemic, we believe the lexemes *hyflex* and *quarantech* to be examples of blends, rather than shortened compounds. In contrast, lexemes *elbump* (*elbow* + *bump*) and *techceleration* (*technology* + *acceleration*), which we initially treated as blends, are shortened versions of pre-existing compounds *elbow bump* and *technology acceleration*, fixed in OED [13]; therefore, there are good reasons not to treat as proper blends, but as clipped compounds, and exclude them from the list of analysed material.

### Type 3. AB (W1) + BC (W2) = ABC (complete overlap)

Blends of this type comprise two whole words with a sound or a combination of sounds overlapping, with no segmental material truncated. This requires that the phoneme or combination of phonemes of the first source word (W1) should coincide with the initial phoneme or combination of phonemes of the second source word (W2).

Such blends resemble compounds most closely, the major difference being that the source words share overlapping segments. Therefore, no structural segments are lost, making this type of blend the most transparent one. The analysed material comprises 9 blends of Type 3 (12.3%), including *coronapocalypse* (*corona* + *apocalypse*), *covideo* (*covid* + *video*), *covidiot* (*covid* + *idiot*), *covidivorce* (*covid* + *divorce*), *coronacronym* (*corona* + *acronym*).

**Type 4. AB (W1) + CD (W2) = ABD**

This type of blend consists of the first source word (whole) and the final splinter of the second source word. This is the most common type of Covid-related blends and includes 23 lexemes, which accounts for 31.5%, such as *coronacation* (*corona* + *vacation*), *coronanoia* (*corona* + *paranoia*), *drivecation* (*drive* + *vacation*), *mockdown* (*mock* + *lockdown*), *spendemic* (*spend* + *pandemic*), *walktail* (*walk* + *cocktail*), *coronacoaster* (*corona* + *rollercoaster*), *covidpreneur* (*covid* + *entrepreneur*), *homeference* (*home* + *conference*), *coronasplaining* (*corona* + *explaining*), *shecession* (*she* + *recession*).

**Type 5. AB (W1) + CD (W2) = ACD**

Blends of Type 5 combine the initial splinter of the first source word and the whole second source word. We found 11 blends of this type (15%) among coinages related to Covid, including *quarantanning* (*quarantine* + *tanning*), *quaranteam* (*quarantine* + *team*), *quarantroll* (*quarantine* + *troll*), *coroneologism* (*corona* + *neologism*), *covexit* (*covid* + *exit*), *inflammageing* (*inflammation* + *ageing*).

**Type 5. Eye blends**

Eye blends must be read rather than seen, because their phonologic form is identical to one of the source words, but the graphic form is different. We found two eye blends (2.7%) in the material under analysis: *quaranteen* (*quarantine* + *teen*) and *maskulinity* (*mask* + *masculinity*).

Many linguists note that blending can, and frequently does, create new morphemes or give new meanings to old ones when recurrent splinters occur in several blends [1], [5], [9]. Lehrer argues that if there are only a few examples of blends with the same splinter, the semi-productivity can be attributed to the process of analogy. However, if instances of blends with a certain splinter are numerous, that it is plausible to maintain that a new morpheme has been created [9, P. 592].

The instances of such morpheme-like splinters in the list of Covid-related vocabulary include the following:

**coron-/corona-/rona-** (connected to, or caused by, the coronavirus): 21 blends (28.8%), e.g. *coronacation* (*corona* + *vacation*), *coronageddon* (*corona* + *armageddon*), *coronallusional* (*corona* + *delusional*), *coronanoia* (*corona* + *paranoia*), *coronapocalypse* (*corona* + *apocalypse*), *coronarita* (*corona* + *margarita*), *coronasomnia* (*corona* + *insomnia*), *coronaspiracy* (*theory*) (*corona* + *conspiracy*), *coronaverse* (*corona* + *universe*), *coronawashing* (*corona* + *brainwashing*), *coroneologism* (*corona* + *neologism*), *coronial*, *coronennial* (*corona* + *millennial*), *ronacoaster* (*corona* + *coaster*), *ronavation* (*corona* + *renovation*);

**quaran-** (connected to, or caused by, the quarantine and self-isolation): 13 blends (17.8%), such as *quarandating* (*quarantine* + *dating*), *quaranqueen* (*quarantine* + *queen*), *quarantanning* (*quarantine* + *tanning*), *quaranteen* (*quarantine* + *teen*), *quarantimes* (*quarantine* + *times*), *quarantini* (*quarantine* + *martini*), *quarantrend* (*quarantine* + *trend*), *quarantroll* (*quarantine* + *troll*), *quarantunes* (*quarantine* + *tunes*), *quaranzine* (*quarantine* + *magazine*);

**cov-/covid-** (connected to, or caused by, the Covid-19): 6 blends (8%), such as *covexit* (*covid* + *exit*), *covideo* (*covid* + *video*), *covidiot* (*covid* + *idiot*), *covidivorce* (*covid* + *divorce*), *covidpreneur* (*covid* + *entrepreneur*);

**mask-** (connected to, or caused by, wearing a face mask): 3 blends (4%): *maskhole* (*mask* + *asshole*), *maskne* (*mask* + *acne*), *maskulinity* (*mask* + *masculinity*);

**-cation/-kation** (a certain, safer type of vacation during lockdown): 8 blends (11%): *coronacation* (*corona* + *vacation*), *drivecation* (*drive* + *vacation*), *safecation* (*safe* + *vacation*), *staycation* (*stay* + *vacation*), *schoolcation* (*school* + *vacation*): a family holiday during which the children receive online schooling; *workkation* (*work* + *vacation*): a holiday where you stay in a hotel or other accommodation and work from there; *nakation* (*naked* + *vacation*): a type of holiday where people do not have to wear clothes most of the time.

Beliaeva argues that in instances when blend splinters are used recurrently, like in the examples given above, the resulting lexical formations resemble affixations rather than typical blends, ensuring the productivity of the word formation pattern [5, P. 17].

It should be noted that apart from the last morpheme-like splinter (*-cation*), all the other examples are initial splinters, which is not a typical phenomenon. Lehrer argues that the most recurrent splinters, such as *-thon*, *-holic*, *-gate*, and *-scape*, *-topia* occur at the end of the word; initial morpheme-like splinters are quite rare and include such examples as *e-* (from *electronic*), *eco-* (from *ecological*) and *-Mc* (as in *McMuffin*) [9, P. 591-592].

**Conclusions**

The upheaval of Covid-19 gave rise to a vast number of neologisms describing the new reality people faced during the pandemic. Blending as a word formation type is similar to compounding, and some linguists do not make a distinction between blends and clipped compounds. This paper argues that blends should be discriminated from clipped compounds, which are contractions of pre-existing compounds, while blends are likely to be instances of new word formation, which does not occur in the full, non-truncated, form.

The article presents two different approaches to a morphological classification of blends. Substitution blends account for almost two-thirds of the analysed lexemes, whereas overlap blends are much less common. The analysis of the morphological structure of blends related to Covid-19 showed that the most common type of blending is combining the first source word in its entirety with the final splinter of the second source word. A few splinters are recurrent, making it possible to argue that these serve as new morphemes and actively participate in the process of creating further coinages in the English language.

**Конфликт интересов**

Не указан.

**Conflict of Interest**

None declared.

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