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Vincent Renner

# Lexical Blending as Wordplay

**Abstract:** This article deals with wordplay in word-formation and centers on lexical blending. It claims that, because of their very formation process, lexical blends are instances of wordplay. Drawing on examples from a variety of languages, it offers a categorization of the different features which may be argued to increase wordplayfulness into five classes: formal complexity, structural transgression, graphic play on words, semantic play on words, and functional ludicity.

**Keywords:** backronymy, Basque, clipping, compounding, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Korean, Latvian, lexical blending, ludic function (of language), Malay, Mandarin Chinese, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, naming function, Polish, Serbian, Spanish, word-formation

## 1 Introduction: Wordplay in Word-Formation

We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment  
[...]. I mean “manipulate” literally: we take some linguistic feature [...] and make it do things it does not normally do.  
David Crystal (2001: 1)

The aim of this article is to apply the concept of wordplay to the linguistic domain of word-formation. The definition of wordplay adopted for this research is the following: an intentional and formally ingenious way of associating the semantics of two or more words in a new morphological object. It only partially overlaps with the definition of word-creation as described by Ronneberger-Sibold (2010). Word-creation is centered on the concept of formal creativity and it encompasses all intentional extra-grammatical morphological processes, i.e. operations in which the output form is not fully predictable from an input and a given rule and is impervious to (un)grammaticality judgments. If lexical blending can be said to be a technique which is both creative and playful, clipping is creative but is not playful (wordplay as defined above crucially involves two inputs) while compounding can be playful – as in the case of metaphonymic echo compounds (see below) – but is not creative in the sense of Ronneberger-Sibold as it is a concatenative process.

Several types of outputs can illustrate wordplay in word-formation, for instance metaphonymic echo compounds, backronyms and lexical blends.<sup>1</sup> Metaphonymic echo compounding consists in concatenating words which are formally quasi-identical into a metonymy- and / or metaphor-based compound. Formal variation may appear at the onset (1)–(5) – the compounding elements have the same rime or superrime – or word-internally in case of medial vocalic alternation (6):

- (1) *Aga saga* ‘middle-class novel’<sup>2</sup>
- (2) *brain drain* ‘loss of skilled labor’
- (3) *kick flick* ‘martial arts movie’
- (4) *sin bin* ‘penalty box’
- (5) *trout pout* ‘collagen-enhanced lips’
- (6) *shit sheet* ‘negative campaign flyer’

Backronymy is a playful process in which the operation of initialization leads to an already existing word, as in (7)–(11):

- (7) *ALICE* < *all-purpose lightweight individual carrying equipment*
- (8) *MACHO* < *massive compact halo object*
- (9) *SQUID* < *superconducting quantum interference device*
- (10) *WASP* < *White Anglo-Saxon Protestant*
- (11) *WIMP* < *weakly interacting massive particle*

Playfulness is increased when the meaning of the earlier word is associated with that of the new backronym, as in (12)–(16):

- (12) *BASIC* < *beginners’ all-purpose symbolic instruction code* ‘easy-to-learn programming language designed to provide computer access to non-science students’
- (13) *GIFT* < *gamete intra-fallopian transfer* ‘assisted reproductive technique against infertility’
- (14) *RIDE* < *reduce impaired driving in Etobicoke*<sup>3</sup> ‘campaign against drink-driving’
- (15) *START* < *strategic arms reduction treaty* ‘treaty intended to stop the nuclear arms race between the US and the Soviet Union’

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1 For a discussion of more types, see Sablayrolles in *The Dynamics of Wordplay* 2.

2 The metonymy alludes to the “popularity of Aga cookers among the English middle classes” (*Collins English Dictionary*).

3 Etobicoke is a district of the city of Toronto, Ontario.

- (16) *USA PATRIOT* < *uniting (and) strengthening America (by) providing appropriate tools required (to) intercept (and) obstruct terrorism* ‘Act of the US Congress signed into law in October 2011, in the wake of 9 / 11’

Lexical blending refers to the act of coalescing several words into one after an act of clipping (17), of overlapping (18), or of both clipping and overlapping (19)<sup>4</sup>:

- (17) *caplet* < *capsule* + *tablet*

- (18) *sexpert* < *sex* + *expert*

- (19) *positron* < *positive* + *electron*

Because of the wide variety of attested patterns, blending can be claimed to be the most complex form of wordplay in word-formation, and this article aims to lay bare these formal intricacies. In the following section, the salient formal and semantic features of lexical blends are introduced, and in Section 3 a detailed taxonomy of playful techniques is then proposed.

## 2 A Brief Description of Lexical Blends

Lexical blends crop up in a variety of domains, from slang (20) to technoscientific terminology (21), from popular media culture (22) to the corporate world (23)–(24):

- (20) *chillax* < *chill* + *relax*

- (21) *disulfiram* < *disulfide* + *tetraethylthiuram*

- (22) *Merkozy* < (*Angela*) *Merkel* + (*Nicolas*) *Sarkozy*

- (23) *Gemalto* < *Gemplus* + *Axalto*

- (24) *ABB* < *ASEA* (< *Allmänna Svenska Elektriska Aktiebolaget*) + *BBC* (< *Brown, Boveri and Cie*)

Blending is a cross-linguistically widespread process. Brdar-Szabo and Brdar (2008) hypothesize that it can appear in any language in which compounding and clipping are both attested morphological operations. The phenomenon is mainly documented in Indo-European languages, but it is also observed in languages as typologically diverse as Korean (Kang 2013), Malay (Dobrovolsky

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<sup>4</sup> Segment overlapping is marked through underlining.

2001), Mandarin Chinese (Ronneberger-Sibold 2012) and Modern Hebrew (Bat-El 2013).

The precise definition of lexical blending is not beyond debate. Some morphologists consider that a lexical item qualifies as a member of the category if at least one source word has been clipped in the blending process (e.g. Mattiello 2013; Miller 2014), but others exclude several types of complex words on various grounds:

- for Ralli and Xydopoulos (2012) and Villoing (2012), a complex word is to be categorized as a blend only if no source word has remained intact, which leads to the exclusion of items such as *contrail* (< *condensation* + *trail*) and *tenoroon* (< *tenor* + *bassoon*);
- for Bat-El (2006), a complex word is unequivocally a blend only if clipping occurs at the “inner edges,” i.e. if the left source word has been back-clipped and the right one fore-clipped, which leads to the exclusion of items such as *modem* (< *modulator* + *demodulator*) and *frohawk* (< *afro* + *mo-hawk*);
- for Dressler (2000), complex words whose source words are not semantically coordinate (i.e. are in a modifier-head relation), such as *rockumentary* (< *rock* + *documentary*) and *wallyball* (< *wall* + *volleyball*), are to be removed from the category of blends; similarly, for Plag (2003: 123), “proper blends” are those items which semantically “resemble copulative compounds,” i.e. are in a coordinate relation;
- for Arcodia and Montermini (2012), complex words which do not manifest overlapping of their source words are not part of the category, which leads to the exclusion of items such as *ginormous* (< *gigantic* + *enormous*) and *humiture* (< *humidity* + *temperature*).

In order to reconcile these conflicting views, one may opt for a prototype approach to categorization and consider that the most inclusive definition is to be retained and that the above traits are not to be taken as defining features, but as typicality features. A blend like *cafetorium* (< *cafeteria* + *auditorium*) is a central member of the category as it displays clipping of both source words at the inner edges, medial overlapping (one shared segment at the graphic level, two at the phonic level) and coordinate semantics.

Various semantic classifications of lexical blends have been suggested in the literature. Fradin, Montermini and Plénat (2009: 39–41), for instance, list five main types of semantic interpretations: coordinate, intersective, argumental, equative, causal. Gries (2012: 154–155) does the same, but with wholly different categories: synonymic, co-hyponymic, contractive, frame relation,

other. One can also unproblematically extend the existing typologies of the compounding literature to blends.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 illustrates the transcategorical dichotomy between coordinative and subordinative items,<sup>6</sup> which is primordial, even more so for blends than for compounds in view of the significant proportion of items for which the two source words are on an equal semantic footing. In English, only a tiny minority of compounds (about 2%) have a coordinative interpretation (Berg 2009: 134) while this is the case of a sizeable minority (about one out of four) of blends (Renner 2014).

**Tab. 1:** A dual semantic classification of lexical blends

	<b>coordinative</b>	<b>subordinative</b>
nominal	<i>zonkey</i> (< <i>zebra</i> + <i>donkey</i> )	<i>rockoon</i> (< <i>rocket</i> + <i>balloon</i> )
adjectival	<i>solunar</i> (< <i>solar</i> + <i>lunar</i> )	<i>fugly</i> (< <i>fucking</i> + <i>ugly</i> )
verbal	<i>meld</i> (< <i>melt</i> + <i>weld</i> )	<i>gazunder</i> (< <i>gazump</i> + <i>under</i> )

In the case of the largest category – that of noun-noun nominal blends –, the classification can be refined as follows: one may distinguish between subordinative items with a relational (25) or an attributive (26) interpretation,<sup>7</sup> and coordinative items with hybrid (27), multifunctional (28), additional (29) or tautological (30) semantics<sup>8</sup>:

(25) *netiquette* ‘etiquette practiced on the net’

(26) *advertorial* ‘advert that looks like an editorial’

(27) *siabon* ‘hybrid offspring of a siamang and a gibbon’

<sup>5</sup> See Scalise and Bisetto (2009); and Arnaud and Renner (2014) for an overview.

<sup>6</sup> Subordinative units are characterized by the presence of a semantic nonhead-to-head relation between the source words (e.g. a rockoon is a rocket that is launched from a balloon) while coordinative units are characterized by the absence of such a relation.

<sup>7</sup> The semantic relation of modification in the subclass of attributive subordinatives consists in the attribution of features of the non-head to the head. The subordinatives which do not exhibit analogy in their nonhead-to-head relation are grouped together in the subclass of relational subordinatives.

<sup>8</sup> A hybrid interpretation corresponds to an A+B unit defined as a hybrid of A and B, a multifunctional interpretation to a unit defined as an A which is also a B, an additional interpretation to a unit defined as an A plus a B, a tautological interpretation to a unit composed of two near-synonyms (see Renner 2008).

- (28) *Spork* ‘utensil that can be used both as a spoon and a fork’  
 (29) *Quechumaran* ‘group of languages composed of the Quechuan and Aymaran families’  
 (30) *doohickey* ‘doodad; hickey’

### 3 A Typology of Wordplayfulness in Lexical Blending

Any process of lexical blending – e.g. *breakfast* + *lunch* > *brunch* – can be considered as involving some form of wordplay as it is an operation which plays with a variety of potential output forms to name a new conceptual combination. In some cases, this potential is actualized, and different outputs generated from the same two source words are co-institutionalized,<sup>9</sup> with identical (31) or different (32)–(34) meanings:

- (31) Engl. *tigon* / *tiglon* ‘hybrid offspring of a male tiger and a female lion’  
 (32) Engl. *apriplum* / *plumcot* ‘50-50 plum-apricot hybrid’  
 (33) Engl. *aprium* ‘apricot-heavy hybrid’  
 (34) Engl. *pluot* ‘plum-heavy hybrid’

Various features can be claimed to increase the wordplayfulness of a blend. They will be detailed and illustrated in the subsections to follow, and have been grouped under five general headings: formal complexity, structural transgression, graphic play on words, semantic play on words, and functional ludicity.

#### 3.1 Formal Complexity

Segment overlapping at the inner edges is a frequent feature of lexical blending. The overlapping segments are underlined in examples (35)–(39)<sup>10</sup>:

- (35) Mod. Hebr. *pomelīt* ‘pomelo-grapefruit hybrid’ < *poméla* ‘pomelo’ + *ʔeškoḷīt* ‘grapefruit’

<sup>9</sup> A unit is said to be institutionalized when its meaning has been established in a particular domain within a community (see Bauer 2004: 56).

<sup>10</sup> (35) is taken from Bat-El (1996: 320); (36) from Borgwaldt and Benczes (2011: 233); (37) from Thornton (1993: 151); (38) from Artiagoitia, Hualde and de Urbina (forthcoming); and (39) from Veisbergs (2013: 49).

- (36) Hung. *citrancs* ‘grapefruit’ < *citrom* ‘lemon’ + *narancs* ‘orange’  
 (37) Ital. *mandarancio* ‘mandarin-orange hybrid’ < *mandarino* ‘mandarin’ + *arancio* ‘orange’  
 (38) Bsq. *sagardo* ‘cider’ < *sagar* ‘apple’ + *ardo* ‘wine’  
 (39) Latv. *mēstule* ‘spam’ < *mēsl* ‘excrement’ + *vēstule* ‘letter’

It is maximized in a phenomenon which Piñeros (2011: 75) describes as “extensive overlapping,” in which all but a few segments of both source words have been kept in a so-called “contour blend” (Ronneberger-Sibold 2006: 170), that is a blend which retains the prosodic structure (i.e. the syllabic length and stress pattern) of the longer source word:

- (40) Engl. *ambisexual* ‘bisexual’ < *ambidextrous* + *sex*  
 (41) Span. *dedocracia* ‘arbitrary exercise of power’ < *a dedo* ‘through string-pulling’ + *democracia* ‘democracy’<sup>11</sup>

Formal complexity also occurs in case of sandwich blending, when a blend has more alternating fragments than it has source words:

- (42) Engl. *chortle* < *ch* + *ort* + *le* < *chuckle* + *snort*  
 (43) Engl. *humongous* < *hu* + *mon* + *g* + *ous* < *huge* + *monstrous*  
 (44) Pol. *KoPuNa* ‘KPN as a communist party’ < *K* + *o* + *P* + *u* + *N* + *a* < *KPN* ‘Confederation of Independent Poland’ + *komuna* ‘communists’<sup>12</sup>

The recovery of the source words is in a similar way made less easy – and thus more playful – in case of cryptoblending, when the output is formally identical to a part of one of the source words:

- (45) Germ. *Ostalgie* ‘nostalgia for East Germany’ < *Osten* ‘East’ + *Nostalgie* ‘nostalgia’<sup>13</sup>  
 (46) Engl. *avigation* ‘aerial navigation’ < *avi-* + *navigation*  
 (47) Engl. *tween* ‘child between middle childhood and adolescence’ < *teen* + *between*

Formal complexity may also correspond to cases of multiple blending, i.e. the process of simultaneously coalescing more than two source words into one:

**11** (41) is taken from Piñeros (2011: 96).

**12** (44) is taken from Konieczna (2012: 61).

**13** (45) is taken from Friedrich (2008: 424).



- (48) Engl. *turducken* ‘turkey stuffed with a duck which is stuffed with a small chicken’ < *turkey* + *duck* + *chicken*
- (49) Fr. *camfranglais* ‘mixture of Cameroonian Creole, French and English’ < *camerounais* ‘Cameroonian Creole’ + *français* ‘French’ + *anglais* ‘English’
- (50) Engl. *Cablinasian* (a term coined by US professional golfer Tiger Woods to refer to his mixed ethnic ancestry) < *Caucasian* + *Black* + *Indian* + *Asian*<sup>14</sup>
- (51) Engl. *Christmahanukkwanzadandiwalstice* (an inclusive term used to refer to the December holidays) < *Christmas* + *Hanukkah* + *Kwanzaa* + *Ramadan* + *Diwali* + (*Winter*) *Solstice*<sup>15</sup>

Blends composed of more than three source words (50)–(51) are exceptionally rare and therefore highly marked.

### 3.2 Structural Transgression

The violation of structural well-formedness rules may occur in the phonology, as in (52), with an output form that contains a syllable onset cluster which is phonotactically illicit in Modern Greek, or (53), which goes against the English syllable constraint which dictates that “if a nasal occurs in the second slot of an onset no nasal occurs in the coda” (Davis 1985: 25):

- (52) Mod. Grk. *mbatáta* ‘rubbish thing’ < *malakía* ‘junk’ + *patáta* ‘crap’<sup>16</sup>
- (53) Engl. *smang* ‘have sex’ < *smash* + *bang*<sup>17</sup>

More commonly, violations are attested in the grammar of the language. Lexical blending may allow combinations of lexical categories which are illicit in compounding, as the following verb-verb verbal units (54)–(55) and noun-verb verbal units (56)–(57) illustrate<sup>18</sup>:

- (54) Fr. *pleurire* ‘cry and laugh’ < *pleurer* ‘cry’ + *rire* ‘laugh’
- (55) Fr. *somnobavait* ‘was drowsing and drooling’ < *somnoler* ‘be half-asleep’ + *baver* [drool]
- (56) Fr. *cadonner* ‘give as a present’ < *cadeau* ‘present’ + *donner* ‘give’
- (57) Fr. *valdorloter* ‘pamper in the Aosta Valley’ < *val d’Aoste* ‘Aosta Valley’ + *dorloter* ‘pamper’

<sup>14</sup> See *Word Spy* (2008: “Cablinasian” *n.*).

<sup>15</sup> See *Urban Dictionary* (2007: “Christmahanukkwandiwalstice” *n.*).

<sup>16</sup> (52) is taken from Ralli and Xydopoulos (2012: 43).

<sup>17</sup> See *Urban Dictionary* (2011: “smang” *v.*).

<sup>18</sup> (54)–(55) are taken from Doppagne (1973: 97); (57) is from Bonhomme (1998: 95).

Another case of transgression is the violation of the linear ordering rules which are applicable in compounding (58)–(59) and in syntax (60)–(61):

- (58) Fr. *gazinière* ‘gas stove’ < *gaz* ‘gas’ + *cuisinière* ‘stove’  
 (59) Engl. *Terylene* (a proprietary name for polyethylene terephthalate) < *terephthalate* + *polyethylene*  
 (60) Fr. *imméprévision* ‘nowcast’ < *immédiate* ‘immediate’ + *prévision* ‘forecast’  
 (61) Engl. *planetesimal* ‘miniature planet’ < *planet* + *infinitesimal*

Left-headedness is the norm in French compounding, and so is right-headedness in English. Right-headed compounding is attested in French (e.g. *photojournalisme*, *véloroute*<sup>19</sup>), and so is left-headed compounding in English (e.g. *clams casino*, *endgame*<sup>20</sup>), but such cases are exceedingly rare. Likewise, attributive adjectival modification is prenominal in English whereas postnominal modification is the unmarked case in French.

Finally, it should be noted that a lexical blend may denote a group of individuals even though such a thing is impossible in the grammar of compounding of the language in question:

- (62) Engl. *Billary* < *Bill (Clinton)* + *Hillary (Clinton)*  
 (62) “it really just reinforced this idea that it is *Billary* [\*Bill-Hillary] that is the candidate” (*Corpus of Contemporary American English / COCA 2008*: “Billary” n.)  
 (63) Engl. *Brangelina* < *Brad (Pitt)* + *Angelina (Jolie)*  
 (63) “sometimes I just want to read *People* magazine and check in with how *Brangelina* [\*Brad-Angelina] are doing” (*COCA 2010*: “Brangelina” n.)

### 3.3 Graphic Play on Words

Graphic play on words groups together the techniques of wordplayfulness which are formally perceptible only in writing. Graphic blending corresponds *sensu stricto* to cases in which the output is homophonous with one of the source words:

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<sup>19</sup> *Photojournalisme* [photojournalism] refers to a type of journalism in which news stories are presented primarily through photographs and *véloroute* [bicycle route] to an uninterrupted and signposted cycling itinerary using public roads and / or independent bikeways.

<sup>20</sup> *Clams casino* refers to a clam dish which was reportedly first served in a casino restaurant (see Olver 2009) and *endgame* to the closing stage of a game of chess.

- (64) Engl. *pharming* ‘production of pharmaceuticals from genetically altered plants or animals’  
 < *pharmaceutical* + *farming*
- (65) Engl. *Jewbilee* < *Jew* + *jubilee*

Other cases of graphic play on words involve the alternation of capital and lower-case letters (66)–(67) and the use of parentheses (68)–(70) or symbols (71)<sup>21</sup>:

- (66) Serb. *nagRADIO* ‘an ad slogan of a radio station which gives out prizes to its listeners’ < *nagradio* ‘gave out a prize’ + *radio*
- (67) Pol. *ROPucha* ‘ROP as a disgusting political party’ < *ROP* ‘Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland’ + *ropucha* ‘toad’
- (68) Pol. *ban(knoty)* ‘banknotes which were a flop’ < *banknoty* ‘banknotes’ + *knoty* ‘flops’
- (69) Pol. *(za)piski* ‘squealing noise’ < *zapiski* ‘notes’ + *piski* ‘squeal’
- (70) Germ. S(CH)EISS ‘shitty Switzerland’ < *Scheiß(e)* ‘shit’ + *CH* ‘country code for Switzerland’
- (71) Germ. *ANL€GER* (the title of a bank’s personal finance magazine) < *Anleger* ‘investor’ + € ‘euro’

The upper-case / lower-case contrast (66)–(67) and the parentheses (68)–(70) are used to mark the internal boundaries of the shorter source word in case of full overlapping. The use of a symbol in example (71) is a special case with limited applicability – it is only possible if the symbol in question corresponds to a quasi-alphabetic character.

### 3.4 Semantic Play on Words

Wordplayfulness does not necessarily only involve the formal manipulation of the source words. In a remarkable number of instances, the association of source words is guided by a salient semantic relation. Examples (72)–(77) are all to be interpreted in the same way – a meaningful segmental string of the longer source word is identified and replaced by its antonym:

- (72) Engl. *underwhelm* < *under* + *overwhelm* [*under* / *over*]
- (73) Engl. / Fr. *sousveillance* ‘countersurveillance’ < *sous* ‘under’ + *surveillance* [*sous* / *sur*]<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> (66) is taken from Halupka-Rešetar and Lalić-Krstin (2009: 118); (67)–(69) are from Konieczna (2012: 61, 62); and (70)–(71) from Friedrich (2008: 281, 448).

<sup>22</sup> The blend was reportedly coined in English – but with French source words – by Steve Mann, a Canadian academic. See *Word Spy* (2005: “sousveillance” n.).

- (74) Fr. *tapuscrit* ‘typed manuscript’ < *tapé* ‘typed’ + *manuscrit* ‘manuscript’ [Fr. *tap(é)* / Lat. *manu*]
- (75) Fr. *embrouillamaxi* ‘giant muddle’ < *embrouillamini* [muddle] + *maxi(mum)* [*maxi* / *mini*]
- (76) Fr. *pantacourt* ‘capri pants’ < *pantalon* ‘pants’ + *court* ‘short’ [*court* / *long*]
- (77) Span. *dictablanda* ‘soft dictatorship’ < *dictadura* ‘dictatorship’ + *blanda* ‘soft’ [*blanda* / *dura*]<sup>23</sup>

### 3.5 Functional Ludicity

To gauge the playfulness of a blend, one may also take into consideration the relative foregrounding / backgrounding of two antagonistic (albeit coexisting) functions of word-formation: its naming function, and the corollary information condensation function in the specific case of complex words, and its ludic (i.e. playful) function. Playfulness is backgrounded when the act of word-formation primarily has a naming and an information condensation function, as is the case for blends belonging to a technical terminology in the widest sense (78)–(81), for opaque blends with metaphonymic semantics (82) and for items which combine these two features (83)–(84):

- (78) Fr. *carburéacteur* ‘jet fuel’ < *carburant* ‘fuel’ + *réacteur* ‘jet engine’
- (79) Fr. *pénaltouche* ‘penalty kicked into touch’ < *pénalité* ‘penalty kick’ + *touche* ‘touch’
- (80) Engl. *bit* < *binary* + *digit*
- (81) Engl. *praziquantel* ‘type of drug against parasitic worms’ < *pyrazine* + *quinoline* + *anthelmintic*
- (82) Fr. *midinette* ‘dressmaker’s apprentice’ < *midi* ‘noon’ + *dînette* ‘light meal’
- (83) Engl. *nicad* ‘battery with a nickel anode and a cadmium cathode’ < *nickel* + *cadmium*
- (84) Engl. *splake* ‘type of hybrid trout’ < *speckled (trout)* + *lake (trout)*

Relative positions on a cline can be assigned, and it might be argued that blends which have retained minimal material from their source words – like example (80) – are closer to the naming end of the cline, i.e. are less playful, than complete blends – like example (82) –, which contain their source words in full.

Conversely, playfulness is foregrounded when the act of word-formation primarily fulfills a ludic function. This is for instance the case when the opera-

<sup>23</sup> (77) is taken from Pharies (1987: 273).

tion of blending is chiefly motivated by the possibility of maximizing overlapping<sup>24</sup>:

- (85) Mod. Grk. *krévome* ‘burp while having a haircut’ < *kurévome* ‘have a haircut’ + *révome* ‘burp’
- (86) Fr. *babarbiturique* ‘tranquillizer strong enough to sedate an elephant’ < *Babar* (the name of a well-known fictional elephant) + *barbiturique* ‘barbiturate’
- (87) Fr. *discourbette* ‘flattering words uttered to be seen in a favorable light by one’s boss’ < *discours* ‘speech’ + *courbette* ‘low bow’

Examples (86)–(87) fall at the extreme ludic end of the cline and could be termed *semasiological blends*<sup>25</sup> as they are not attested in discourse and have been coined on purely formal grounds, a humorous definition being forged only subsequently to the formation of the blend. Dictionary-like books containing long lists of such coinages and their definitions have become popular in France since the 1980s (see Léturgie 2012).

## 4 Conclusion

Coining a new lexical blend is an act of wordplay. Even the simple clipping and fusing of *breakfast* and *lunch* into *brunch* is, as the following excerpt – which is the earliest attestation of the blend recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2014: “brunch” *n.*) – illustrates:

The combination-meal, when nearer the usual breakfast hour, is “brunch,” and when nearer luncheon, is “blunch.”

*Punch* (1896, vol. 111: 58)

The new form may be rendered more playful if the coiner does not simply aim at clipping a source word, but is also eager to repeat the act (sandwich blending, multiple blending), to play with phonemes (overlapping, cryptoblending) and characters (graphic play on words), with morphemic segmentation and sense relations (antonymic play on words), to break combinatorial rules (phonological

<sup>24</sup> (85) is taken from Ralli and Xydopoulos (2012: 43); (86)–(87) are from Finkielkraut (1981).

<sup>25</sup> Galisson (1987) (cited in Léturgie 2012: 204) speaks of semasiological neology as the neological process moves from form to meaning: a new complex word is coined before a matching definition is sought.

and grammatical violations). These different features of wordplay can be combined and thus lead to a prototype-based typology of wordplayfulness in lexical blending. Some blends may be considered to be more playful than others as they associate several features of playfulness. *Planetesimal* (61) and *Billary* (62) for instance involve both segment overlapping (i.e. formal complexity) and grammatical transgression.

Processing a novel blend is, in a similar way, akin to a language game, in which the hearer / reader is expected to identify the source words which have been condensed in the output form and to compute a semantic relation which is contextually plausible. Lexical blends can thus be seen as the building blocks of a singular form of interpersonal rapport between the speaker / writer and hearer / reader which is founded on the ludic exploration of the limits of verbal inventiveness and recognizability. Linguistic ingenuity is required in both the encoding and decoding of a novel blend, establishing a common ground which leads to phatic bonding between the speaker / writer and hearer / reader.

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