Blending in a Zabrockian way

Camiel Hamans (European Parliament)

Traditionally blending is considered to be an irregular process.

(1) brunch from breakfast + lunch
(2) stagflation from stagnation + inflation
(3) franglais (French) from français + anglais
(4) Ostalgie (German) from Ost + Nostalgie

In the first example only the first cluster of ‘source word I’ is taken and it replaces the onset of ‘source word II’.

In example (2) ‘source word I’ seems to be truncated after the first syllable, whereas the first syllable/morpheme of ‘source word II’ has been skipped, so as to combine the two remaining parts, stag andflation.

In (3) the whole word anglais remains unaffected. Only the first consonantal cluster of français has been added to form a new onset. However, the first vowel of the resulting word is homophonous to the first vowel of both source words. This might be significant as well.

The resulting form in (4) can be described as a clipped form of ‘source word II’, Nostalgie minus onset, although a description in terms of a combination of full first source word + last part of ‘source word II’ is also possible.

As these examples show it is really unpredictable which part combines with which part.

Recently some research has been done on blends. Plag (2003) comes to a formation rule

(5) AB+CD → AD

Except for the first description of Ostalgie this rule seems to be correct, but it does not explain the length of A and D.

Zabrocki’s theory of diacrisis or distinctive morphology can be helpful in this respect.

Zabrocki compares word forms and distinguishes between similar and different parts, the so called confusiva and diffusiva:

(6) tak  tak  tak  tak  tam
dak  dal  plak  tok  tal
plak  ham  smak  tik  tap

Here the confusiva are in bold.
“The relation of diacrisis binds words which are heterophonous and signify different meanings.”
(Bańczerowski 2002:295) The effect of this ‘inter-word paradigmatic relation’ (idem: 296) is that there might be felt a kind of similarity between the identical parts.

This notion of confusivum, which is very fruitful in explaining suffix reinterpretation, can be used to explain the process of blending as well. Zabrocki’s theory implies aspects of recognizability or identifiability. This notion, which is not very precise and formal, offers exactly that kind of semantic information which is needed to interpret the meaning of blends correctly.

References