

Blends vis-à-vis Compounds in English

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In chemistry, a compound is a substance created by combining two (or more) substances chemically in a certain ratio by weight. In a compound, the ingredients are present in a definite proportion and form a pure homogeneous unit, like *carbon dioxide* consisting of a *carbon* atom covalently double bonded to two *oxygen* atoms (CO_2). By contrast, a mixture is a substance formed as a result of intermingling two or more substances into one, physically. In a mixture, the constituents are present in a variable proportion and can form an impure substance which is often heterogeneous, like *sand and water*, or *sugar and salt*. Thus, a chemical compound results in the making of a new substance, whereas a mixture does not lead to the creation of any new substance.

In English word-formation, compounds and blends exhibit the same distinctive features, except that they may both result in new words. What distinguishes compounds from blends is their regular process of composition, according to abstract formulae and consistent patterns which are not in blends. In other words, compounds are grammatical, i.e. formed according to word-formation rules, and therefore highly productive and predictable. By contrast, blends are regarded as an irregular and unpredictable mechanism in word-formation (Marchand 1969; Aronoff 1976; Bauer 1983: 225; Cannon 1986: 744). Hence, they are denied a place in regular morphology (e.g. Dressler 2000), and are rather relegated to extra-grammatical word-creation (Ronneberger-Sibold 2010; Mattiello 2013). However, Bauer, Lieber & Plag (2013: 462) argue that “blends are a productive word-formation process in English which, in spite of the considerable variability, conforms to a number of general principles and tendencies that highly restrict the structure of possible formations”.

This study investigates a collection of new English blends drawn from the OED (e.g. *listicle* ← *list* + *article*, *jeggings* ← *jeans* + *leggings*, *burkini* ← *burka* + *bikini*) vis-à-vis new English compounds (e.g. *blue state*, *flash mob*, *live-blog*) and discriminates between the two morphological categories from morphotactic and morphosemantic perspectives. It shows that, whereas new compounds are formed according to exact rules, comparable to the rules of sciences such as physics, mathematics, or chemistry, new blends are only created according to tendencies and strategies, which are typical and acceptable only in the humanities. As a result, novel blends are less predictable than novel compounds, and their source words are less easily recognisable (Connolly 2013). For instance, it is not foreseeable how much of the first or second source word will be preserved (cf. Gries 2004), nor is it predictable what is the semantic weight of each source word in determining the meaning of the blend.

Given the growing number of blends observed in English (Lehrer 2007; Connolly 2013), several attempts have been done by linguists to find out regularities in English blends (Bat-El 2006; Bat-El & Cohen 2012; Bauer 2012; Arndt-Lappe & Plag 2013; Beliaeva 2014). However, blending still poses problems of fuzzy boundaries and lack of transparency. This study offers different degrees of predictability and regularity for new English blends. It finally shows how new lexical blends are often coined to name mixtures, alloys, chemicals, amalgams, and hybrid substances whose blended structure is iconically reflected by the fusion in the process of formation of their names.

Key words: blends; compounds; English; predictability; extra-grammatical morphology.

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