

When Form Follows Function: A Pragmatic Analysis of Portmanteau Words

Asst.Prof.Dr.Atyaf Hasan Ibrahim

Al-Iraqia University



Portmanteau as Linguistic Blends

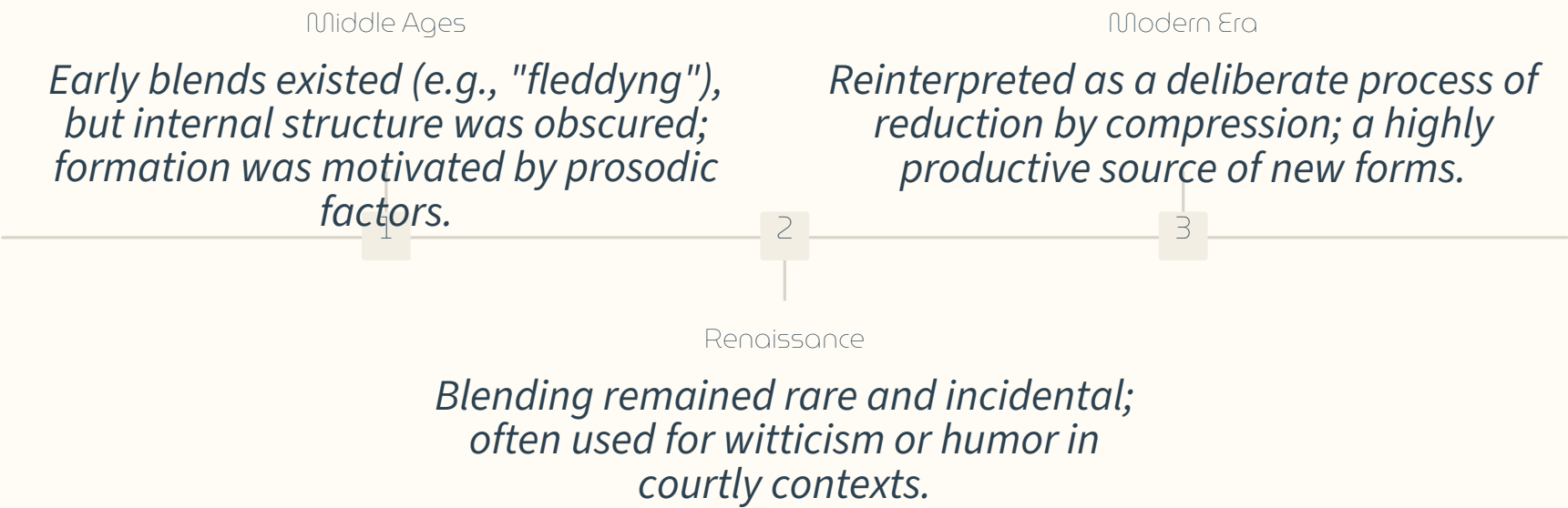
A well-known definition describes portmanteau words as "words that combine two separate words, whose meanings are blended by the new word" (1960). They are compound words combining elements from two or more sources, reflecting linguistic adaptation in communities undergoing cultural transition.

Linguistic Novelty

These blends encapsulate the dynamism of language within a social context, showing language change and cultural amalgamation.

The Concept of Portmanteau: From Suitcase to Word

The term "portmanteau" originally meant a two-compartment case for carrying clothes, adopted in the 1600s.



Reasons for the Emergence of Portmanteaus in New Contexts



Migrant communities often create portmanteaus as they encounter new conditions, leading to a rapid linguistic shift.

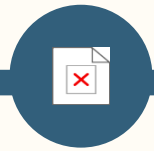
- *Speakers may suppress their mother tongue for social or psychological reasons.*
- *The blends help acculturate to the new linguistic environment.*
- *Historical factors, like migration to English-speaking countries, maximized portmanteau formation.*

Research Aims and Problem



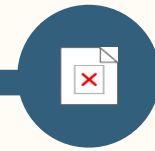
Identify Expressions

To identify common portmanteau expressions used in discourse.



Analyze Formation

To analyze their constituents and the morphological processes used in forming them.



Determine Functions

To identify their pragmatic functions in communication.

The problem lies in prioritizing productive portmanteaus, as many texts did not exhibit productive instances, making data analysis challenging.

Rules of Formation

Portmanteau as a type of new word, reflects the human view of the environment, and can arise from names, places, and events (e.g., combining "name" and "oceanic" into "moniker" and "pacific"). They are based on conventions and rules that ensure direct and obvious construction, crucial for coded communication.

Adjacency

The blending act must occur within the same clause in spoken language to maintain flow and avoid jarring the listener.

Substitution

Elements are replaced or combined to create the new form.

Non-Collapsing

The new word must retain recognizable elements of its source words.

Three Types of Portmanteau Words

Portmanteaus are classified based on their domain of use, ranging from popular culture to technical vocabulary and slang.

Mass Media & Popular Culture

Abundant, often reflecting humor and creativity, e.g., 'aerotropolis', it used to be catchy and easy to remember.

Technical Vocabulary (Quasi-Blends)

Incorporated into authoritative dictionaries, often in high-tech fields, e.g., 'nanotechnology'.

Everyday Language & Slang

Prevalent in Internet slang and adaptations of existing forms, e.g., 'sus'. Often dependent on context.

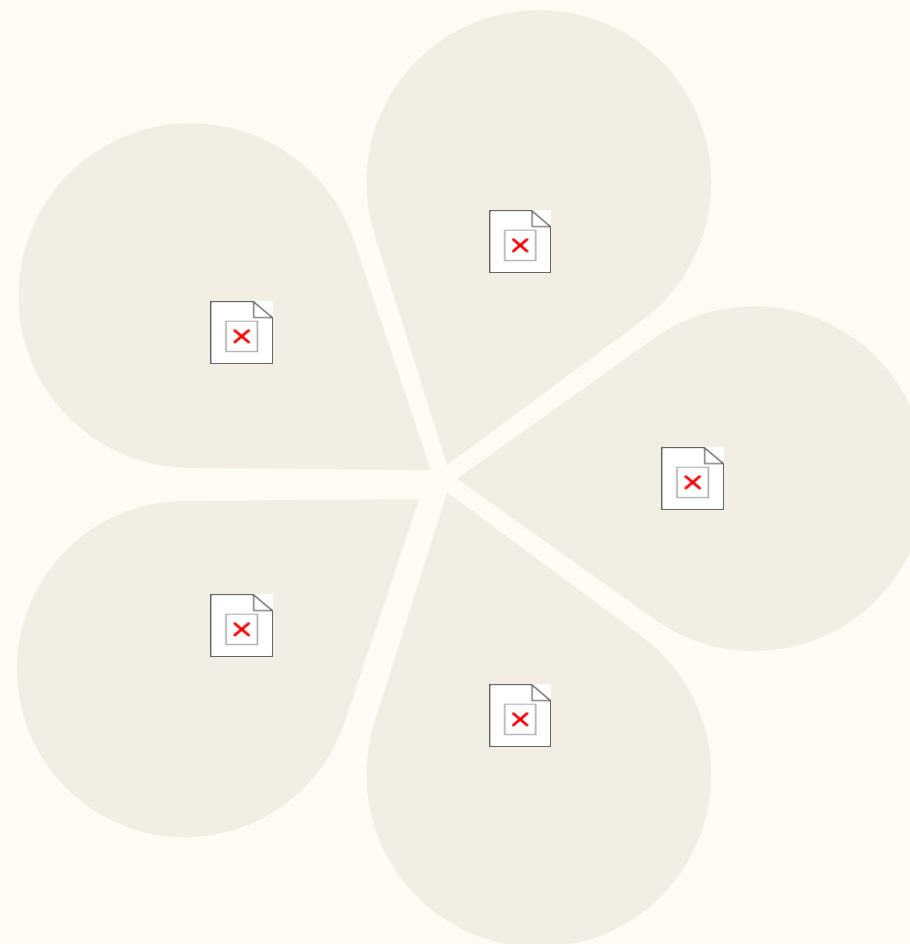
Portmanteaus are widely used in media headlines for discourse economy and to attract attention (e.g., 'smog', 'hangry', 'Brexit').

Pragmatic Functions: Why We Blend Words

Portmanteau words are practical units of meaning that make discourse vivid and engaging, serving multiple communicative purposes.

Branding / Identity
Signal product identity (e.g., Frappuccino) or community membership (e.g., Techmas).

Sociolinguistic Indexing
Signal group identity or insider knowledge (e.g., Spanglish).



Humor / Play

Create comic effect, exaggeration, or irony (e.g., Sharknado).

Genre-Labeling

Compactly name hybrid media practices (e.g., vlog).

Affective Shorthand

Convey emotional or bodily states (e.g., ambivert) or evaluative stance.

The data analyzed including 20 English-language YouTube videos, mixing pragmatic, morphological, and sociolinguistic levels of analysis, resulted the following processes to be dominant in the creation of the portmanteau words:



Overlap Blend

*Source words overlap on a shared segment (e.g., **breakfast** + **lunch** = **brunch**).*



Concatenative Blend

*One source is clipped and joined with the other word (e.g., **stay** + **vacation** = **staycation**).*



Syllable-wise Fusion

*Whole syllables from each source are combined (e.g., **Spanish** + **English** = **Spanglish**).*



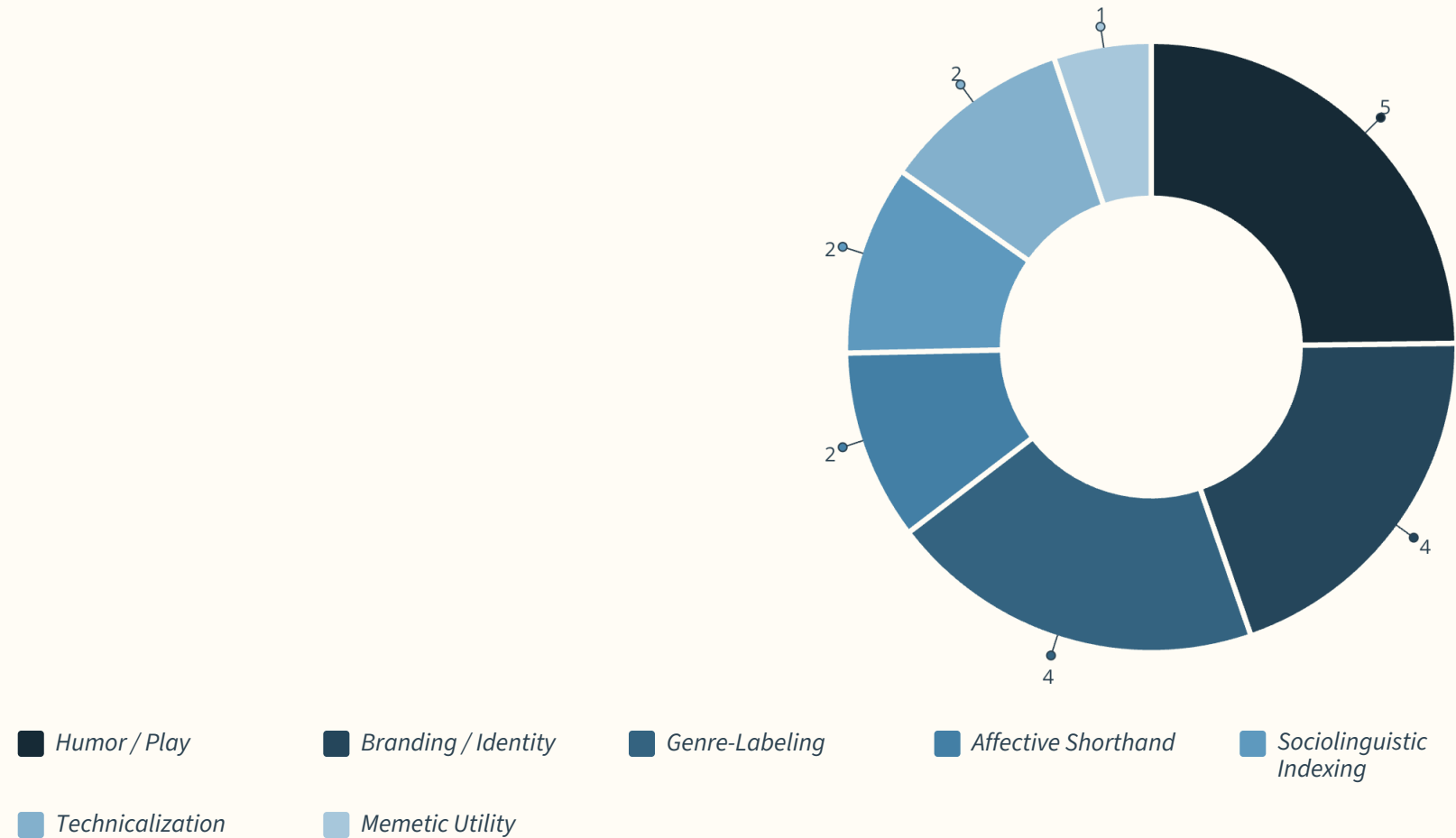
Proper-Name Fusion

*Two proper names are fused, often as media shorthand (e.g., **Brangelina**).*

Overlapping and concatenative blends accounted for 60% of the forms, reflecting the need for brevity and phonological smoothness in naturally-formed portmanteaus.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Portmanteau words flourish in everyday language, driven by creativity and social performativity rather than strict linguistic necessity.



Humor and Branding were the most dominant functions, indicating that portmanteaus are primarily created for entertainment and self-promotion.

- *Blending is a productive process achieving linguistic economy and social performativity.*
- *Some portmanteau words are changeable while others seem to be relatively timeless in avoiding changing or being abandoned.*
- *Portmanteaus often obtain new meanings, which can vary based on context.*
- *Once localized, they often become global cultural identifiers.*

Thanks for Listening