

Latin Lesson 21

The goal of Lesson 21 is to examine one last type of semantic change, blends, and that's it. We're all but done with the Latin section of this course. Woo hoo! Once you've watched this presentation — and it won't take long! — please listen to its audio counterpart which discusses the suffixes and bases in this lesson.

Okay, let's make this quick. It's not complicated. In this lesson, Mr. Ayers introduces one final type of semantic change, "blends." A blend is "a word formed by combining two other words such that a part of each remains and the meaning of the new word suggests both of its constituent members."

Modern English is packed with blends. We love making them, mostly as jokes, for instance, herstory, a mixture of her and history, meaning "the study of the past focusing on issues relating to women's lives and concerns." Her - story! Get it? Here's another blend: affluenza, a combination of affluent and influenza, meaning "an unnatural interest in making and keeping wealth." Another way of saying this might be contracting a cash-rash. Haha.

Blends have been used and recognized for centuries in English. They were once termed "portmanteau words" — a portmanteau is one of those large suitcases or traveling trunks used for carrying clothes; you've seen them in old movies — but since very few people today own a portmanteau or even know what one is, the term blend has replaced portmanteau word. Too bad! "Portmanteau word" is a more elegant term than blend, and it was coined by none other than Lewis Carroll, the author of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Here are some more blends. Can you tell me what words are being combined to construct them?

- Interpol? It's a blend of ... international and police, which is what Interpol is.
- How about spam? That's tougher. It's a blend of spiced and ham, originally a canned meat food given to soldiers in World War II. It was much maligned, not because it tasted bad but because it was all the guys had to eat. From there the term degenerated and came to mean anything pervasive and pointless, hence the computer term.
- What about hazmat? Good! Hazardous + material.
- Cybrarian? Cyber- + librarian. Can you guess what a cybrarian is? A librarian who specializes in internet sources.
- Here's a wild blend: coopetition. What words contributed to that blend? Cooperation and competition, which sounds like an oxymoron, two opposites jammed together. Coopetition happens when rival companies work together to bring down a third competitor. Another way to say this might be "ganging up on the little guy."
- Finally, one of the oldest recorded blends in English is contraption. It's attested as early as 1825 and is a rare triple(!) blend, most likely a combination of contrivance, trap and invention (or possibly deception).

Now let's try blending the other way around. I'll give the definition. You give me the blend, starting with:

- a new custom arises of having a meal between breakfast and lunch? What do you call it?
brunch

- rich people build landing pads for helicopters on the roofs of skyscrapers to save time in traffic? What's that? *A helipad*
- girlfriends, like wives, demand payment for "services rendered" from their boyfriends? *palimony*
- Hollywood capitalizes on the success of a movie by continuing a series but exploring the backstory? *prequel*
- the type of behavior which is appropriate for the internet? *netiquette*
- a third victory in succession? *a three-peat*
- a mechanical illustrator used to draw lines on a television screen? *a telestrator*
- a small computer resource involving simple binary unit operations (on/off, yes/no, zero/one)? *bit*

Blends perform an important function in language. They allow us to create terms which bridge concepts. They also let one word do the work of two and that saves us both time and breath. Besides that, they generate humor — and ask any doctor: laughing is good for you — because they create funny words which describe sometimes absurd situations, such as phubbing, a blend of "phone" and "snubbing," in other words, when you ignore the people around you and stare at your phone, as in "Don't phubb Grandma! She can't phubb back. Her phone is attached to the wall."

Let's end this presentation by looking at the blends Ayers lists in Exercise 4 of this lesson on page 124 (at the top of the page).

- What is *Amerind* a blend of? American + Indian. It's a term for native peoples. We used to call them Indians, but since they don't live in India and other people who don't mind being called Indians do, we had to blend up a better term.
- What about *dumfound*? It's a combination of dumb and confound(ed), which is what you are if you're dumfounded.
- *Electrocute*? What's that a blend of? Electricity and execute.
- *Agitprop*? That's harder because you don't hear it as often, but the term is still used. It's agitation + propaganda, that is, information, real or not — in other words, fake news — which is spread around to stir people up. Originally, this blend was invented during the Cold War to refer to communist propaganda, but perhaps you in your lifetime have experienced it too. If not, you're not listening. And now you have a word for it.
- *Gestapo*? That's a German blend of *Geheime* and *Staatspolizei* ("Secret State Police"), one of Hitler's more notorious groups.
- *Motel*? A motor hotel. You can "motor" your car right up to the door.
- *Quasar*? A quasi-stellar object. It sort of resembles a star but it's not.
- *Moped*? A bicycle which you pedal, but it also has a little motor.
- *Telecast*? A television broadcast. And finally ...
- *Transistor*? A transfer resistor, a huge breakthrough in electronics. In the 1950's transistors began to replace vacuum tubes in many appliances and saved people a lot of time. Do you know how long it takes for a vacuum tube to warm up? You don't because you're young, and transistorized, and lucky!

And that's it for this video presentation. In the accompanying audio presentation for Lesson 21, we'll look at the bases and suffixes to be memorized here. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site.

Stay strong! We're almost done with the Latin section of the course!

ASSIGNMENT

This audio presentation covers the exercises in Latin Lesson 21. Please turn to page 122 where Mr. Ayers introduces the last of the Latin suffixes you have to memorize in this class. The first one, *-ify/-efy*, is a rare type, a verb-forming suffix. Remember that the reason verb-forming suffixes are so rare is because many bases already have a verbal sense; thus, there's no need to turn them into verbs. But then again nouns *do* exist, and so this suffix is used when we decide to "verbify" a noun. For the record, "verbify" is not a word, though it could be. Nah!

The second suffix in this lesson is closely related to the first. It's its adjective-forming counterpart *-ific*, meaning "making, causing."

About the bases in this lesson, there are a few things worth noting. To *MEDI-*, which Mr. Ayers defines as "middle," please add the meaning "the middle *of*." The "median" of a road is not the middle road but the space that is in the middle *of* the road.

PET- has a French alternative, [*PEAT-*]. Please add that and don't forget to put it in square brackets. You need to have this variant when you etymologize a word like "repeat." Note also that this base has an aggressive sense which is why Mr. Ayers has added the meaning "assail." You see that forceful connotation in words like "compete, impetuous."

Finally let's add a base here, one you'll see in a number of Latinate words in English, *PRED-*. It means "plunder, prey." [That's prey with an e, not an a.] Can you think of a derivative which uses this base? What do you call an animal which hunts for prey? A predator. And what do predatory forces leave behind? Depredations, another word for burned buildings and smoking ruins. Of course, depredations can also be figurative. You can talk about the depredations of time, for instance, when describing aging infrastructure.

And finally don't forget to study the rest of the bases here! You're required to memorize them.

That's it for this audio presentation. Short is beautiful, isn't it?

Happy etymologizing!