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Submorphemic elements in the formation of acronyms, blends and clippings¹⁴⁷

Ingrid Fandrych¹⁴⁸

Abstract

Mainstream word-formation is concerned with the formation of new words from morphemes. As morphemes are full linguistic signs, the resulting neologisms are transparent: speakers can deduce the meanings of the new formations from the meanings of their constituents. Thus, morphematic word-formation processes can be analysed in terms of their modifier/head relationship, with $A + B > AB$, and $AB = (\text{a kind of}) B$. This pattern applies to compounding and affixation. There are, however, certain word-formation processes that are not morpheme-based and that do not have a modifier/head structure. Acronyms like *NATO* are formed from the initial letters of word groups; blends like *motel* ‘mix’ or conflate submorphemic elements; clippings like *prof* shorten existing words. In order to analyse these word-formation processes, we need concepts below the morpheme level. This paper will analyse the role played by elements below the morpheme level in the production of these non-morphematic word-formation processes which have been particularly productive in the English language since the second half of the 20th century.

Keywords: acronym — blend — clipping — morpheme — splinter — word-formation — morphology

Résumé

L'on sait que la formation des néologismes a trait à la création de nouveaux mots à partir de morphèmes. Comme le morphème est un signe à part entière, les néologismes qui résultent de ce processus sont transparents : on peut déduire leur signification à partir de la signification de leurs éléments constituants. Pour cette raison, la formation de mots morphématiques peut être considérée comme la combinaison d'un modifiant et d'un modifié : $A + B > AB$, c'est-à-dire, $AB = (\text{une sorte de}) B$. Ce principe est valable pour la composition et la dérivation. Cependant, il y a aussi des processus qui n'utilisent pas les morphèmes et qui ne peuvent pas donc être analysés selon le principe d'un modifiant suivi d'un modifié. Les acronymes comme *OTAN* sont des combinaisons des initiales de groupes de mots ; les amalgames comme *motel* combinent des éléments submorphémiques ; les troncations comme *prof* témoignent de la coupure de mots plus longs. Pour analyser ces formations, on a besoin d'éléments plus petits que le morphème. Cet article se propose d'analyser la formation de mots non-morphématiques, lesquels jouissent d'une productivité exceptionnelle en anglais depuis la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, qui sont composés d'éléments submorphémiques.

¹⁴⁷ I am grateful to Alison Love, Francina Moloi (both National University of Lesotho) and two anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Mots-clés : acronyme — amalgame — troncation — morphème — éclat — formation de mots — morphologie

1. Words, lexemes and the elements of word-formation

According to Marchand (1969: 1), the word is “the smallest independent, indivisible, and meaningful unit of speech, susceptible of transposition in sentences.” A more precise term is the lexeme. Lexemes are “the items listed in the lexicon, or ‘ideal dictionary’, of a language” (Cruse 1986: 49):

[A] lexeme is a family of lexical units; a lexical unit is the union of a single sense with a lexical form; a lexical form is an abstraction from a set of word forms (or alternatively – it is a family of word forms) which differ only in respect of inflections. (Cruse 1986: 80),

The lexeme, is a ‘word’ in the sense of “abstract vocabulary item” (Katamba 1993: 17f), the inflected realization of which is used in sentences. Similarly, Crystal (1995: 118) defines the lexeme as “a unit of lexical meaning, which exists regardless of any inflectional endings it may have or the number of words it may contain”, and Haspelmath (2002: 13) defines the lexeme as an abstract “dictionary word” consisting of a “set of word forms”, while a word-form is a concrete “text word” which “belongs to one lexeme”.

McArthur’s (1992: 599) definition of the lexeme is remarkable for its inclusion of non-morphematic processes; according to him, a lexeme is “a unit in the lexicon or vocabulary of a language. Its form is governed by sound and writing or print, its content by meaning and use”; lexemes can be single words, parts of words (*auto-*, *-logy*), “groups of words” (*blackbird*, *kick the bucket*), and “shortened forms” (*flu*, *UK*) (1992: 600). In the context of the present study, the distinction between the terms ‘lexeme’, ‘lexical unit’ and ‘word’ is not of central importance, as the focus will not be on inflectional or derivational issues. I will use the term ‘lexeme’ for the end-product of word-formation processes, be they morpheme-based or not.

Marchand’s (1969: 2) main focus in his classic work on word-formation is on ‘regular’, that is, morphematic, word-formation processes:

Word-formation is that branch of the science of language which studies the patterns on which a language forms new lexical units, i.e. words. Word-formation can only be concerned with composites which are analysable both formally and semantically ...

However, he admits (1969: 2) that there are formations which are not morpheme-based: “This book ... will deal with two major groups: 1) words formed as grammatical syntagmas, i.e. combinations of full linguistic signs, and 2) words which are not grammatical syntagmas, i.e. which are not made up of full linguistic signs.” His “non-grammatical” word-formation processes (his category 2) comprise “expressive symbolism”, blending, clipping, rime and ablaut gemination, and “word-manufacturing” (Marchand, 1969: 2f). Thus, Marchand (1969: 451) maintains that blends, for example, are monemes, as they are not analysable in terms of constituent morphemes. Numerous more recent studies agree with Marchand, for example Bauer (1983: 232) who calls non-morphematic word-formation processes “unpredictable”, and Aronoff (1981: 20) who labels them as “oddities”.

This has even led to a certain debate about whether non-morphematic word-formation processes should be part of word-formation. Štekauer (1998: 1), for instance, observes that

[l]inguists differ in their opinions as to whether word-formation is to be restricted to affixation, with compounding being shifted to syntax, whether such processes as back-formation, conversion (zero-derivation), blending, clipping etc., are to be included within the theory of word-formation, and if so – what their status is with regard to the ‘main’ word-formation processes, etc.

And he decides to “exclude collocations and non-morpheme-based formations from the Word-Formation Component” (Štekauer 1998: 164).

Haspelmath (2002: 2f) also excludes non-morphematic word-formation processes, such as acronyms, blends and clippings, from the central focus of word-formation, as morphology is “the study of systematic covariation in the form and meaning of words” or “the study of the combination of morphemes to yield words” with morphemes as “[t]he smallest meaningful constituents of words that can be identified” (Haspelmath 2002: 3). However,

[w]ords are mirrors of their times. By looking at the areas in which the vocabulary of a language is expanding in a given period, we can form a fairly accurate impression of the chief preoccupations of society at that time and the points at which the boundaries of human endeavor are being advanced. (Ayto 1999: iv)

According to Ayto (1999: ix), acronyms and blends are symbols of the second half of the 20th century. Acronyms, in particular, have become increasingly productive, due to use of computers and electronic communication¹⁴⁹.

In their book about word-formation intended for the wider public, Steinmetz & Kipfer (2006: 38-65; 159-165) even discuss acronyms, blending and clipping before compounding and derivation (Steinmetz & Kipfer 2006: 188-203). This makes sense in a book intended for the wider, “lay” public, due to the catchiness of non-morphematic word-formation processes. They emphasize the use-relatedness of non-morphematic word-formation processes, their economy (Steinmetz & Kipfer 2006: 40), humour (Steinmetz & Kipfer 2006: 47) and their increasing popularity in the 20th century.

Traditionally, the morpheme has been defined as a unit of form and meaning, a full linguistic sign. Thus, Bolinger (1950: 120, 124) states that “... meaning is the criterion of the morpheme”, and that “[...] meanings vary in their degree of attachment to a given form.” Even today, morphemes are usually defined as the smallest meaningful linguistic units (see, for example, Katamba 1993: 20 and 24; Lipka 1973: 181 and 2002: 85; Marchand 1969: 5f; Mugdan 1994: 2546; Plag 2003: 10 and 20f; Stockwell & Minkova 2001: 57). Stockwell & Minkova (2001: 60) are representative in their summary:

These, then, are the four essential properties of all morphemes: (1) they are packaged with meaning; (2) they can be recycled; (3) they may be represented by any number of syllables; and (4) morphemes ‘morph’, i.e., they may have phonetically different shapes.

However, not all linguists agree with this definition. Adams’ (1973: 140ff) morpheme definition centres around the capacity of morphemes to enter new formations; therefore, her

¹⁴⁹ See also Fandrych 2007 for a discussion of non-morphematic word-formation processes in electronic communication.

morpheme concept is much more flexible and not restricted to full linguistic signs. For example, she analyses formations like *deceive*, *recur*, *consist* as consisting of the morphemes: *de-*, *re-*, *con-*, and *-ceive*, *-cur*, *-sist*. Aronoff (1981: 7ff) also deviates from the above definition: as words are characterised by certain idiosyncratic features, not all morphemes carry meaning, while words are “minimally meaningful”. In his words: “Note that we have not abandoned the concept of the morpheme. It still remains, but not always as a sign” (Aronoff 1981: 14). He defines the morpheme as a “phonetic string which can be connected to a linguistic entity outside that string. What is important is not its meaning, but its arbitrariness” (Aronoff 1981: 15).

In the present study, the concept of ‘morpheme’ will be understood in its most common meaning, that is, as referring to minimally meaningful linguistic units. However, as there are word-formation processes which do not make use of morphemes, the contributions of smaller units than the morpheme to these word-formation processes will be discussed: initials in the case of acronyms, splinters in the case of blends, and free splinters in the case of clippings.

2. Non-morphematic word-formation

According to Fandrych (2004), non-morphematic word-formation is defined

as any word-formation process that is **not morpheme-based** ..., that is, which uses at least one element which is not a morpheme; this element can be a splinter, a phonæstheme, part of a syllable, an initial letter, a number or a letter used as a symbol. (Fandrych 2004: 18; emphasis in original)

In English, the major non-morphematic word-formation processes are acronymy, blending, clipping and onomatopœia¹⁵⁰.

The literature¹⁵¹ on non-morphematic word-formation processes has mostly been structurally oriented – with the exception of Fandrych 2004, who presents a multi-level approach to non-morphematic word-formation processes, incorporating socio-pragmatic and textual aspects –, and many publications analyse one process in isolation (Algeo 1975, Baum 1955 and 1962, Jung 1987, McCully & Holmes 1988 and Cannon 1989: acronyms; Berman 1961, Schwarz 1970, Soudek 1978 and Cannon 1986 and 2000: blends; Heller & Macris 1968, McArthur 1988, Kobler-Trill 1994 and Kreidler 1979, 1994 and 2000: shortenings). Other recent works are situated within the generative framework, in particular several publications on rhyme and ablaut reduplications, and phonetic symbolism (Marantz 1982, Alderete et al. 1999, Dienhart 1999, and Minkova 2002 and Gries 2004). A third stream within the literature uses the cognitive approach to analyse certain non-morphematic word-formation processes (Kelly 1998, Lehrer 1996, Ravid & Hanauer 1998 and López Rúa 2002).

¹⁵⁰ Strictly speaking, onomatopœia (imitation, sound symbolism and reduplication) are also non-morphematic, however, they will not be discussed in this paper as some cases are creations *ex nihilo*, such as *miaow*, or make use of entire words, such as *wishy-washy*.

Fandrych (2004: 18) considers back-formation, or back-derivation, as morphematic, because “usually, a suffix (that is a **morpheme**) is deleted [...]” (emphasis in original).

¹⁵¹ For a more detailed review of the most relevant literature on non-morphematic word-formation processes, see Fandrych (2004: 59-100). Other, less relevant literature includes Baum 1956 and 1957, Bryant 1974 and 1977, Feinsilver 1979, Fenzl 1966, French 1977, Friederich 1966 and 1968, Hockett 1980 and 1983, Poethe 1997, Shapiro 1986, Starke 1997, Tsur 2001, and Wölcken 1957.

In some of the literature, acronyms and blends are categorised as subtypes of each other, for example in Stockwell & Minkova (2001: 7):

Acronyms ... are a special type of blend. A typical acronym takes the first sound form each of several words and makes a new word from those initial sounds. If the resulting word is pronounced like any other word it is a true acronym ... Often, however, to make an acronym pronounceable, we take not just the initial sounds but, for example, the first consonant and the first vowel together. ... These are half-way between blends and acronyms.

Similarly, Plag (2003: 13) states that blends

are amalgamations of parts of different words, such as *smog* (← *smoke/fog*) or *modem* (← *modulator/demodulator*). Blends based on orthography are called acronyms, which are coined by combining the initial letters of compounds or phrases into a pronounceable new word (*NATO*, *UNESCO*, etc.). Simple **abbreviations** like *UK* or *USA* are also quite common. The classification of blending either as a special case of compounding or as a case of non-affixational derivation is not so clear ... we will argue that it is best described as derivation. (emphases in original)

In view of the many differences between blends and acronyms – not least the mediums in which they originate, this is not convincing¹⁵².

Some researchers try to explain acronyms, blends and clippings in terms of their orthographical and/or phonological structures, using, for example, syllable boundaries to explain blend structure. One such attempt is by Plag (2003: 116-129) who attempts to explain acronyms, blends and clippings as “Prosodic Morphology”. McCully & Holmes (1988) claim that acronyms are formed on the basis of phonological rules. This is hardly convincing, as it is one of their special features that most acronyms are formed consciously and with pen and paper in hand – especially reverse acronyms, such as *PIN*, *PLAN* and *top* (see below). Similarly, Kelly (1998) seeks “evidence that certain patterns in blends can be predicted quite well from specific cognitive and linguistic principles” (1998: 580), focusing on “three aspects of blend structure: the order of blend components, the boundary between them, and similarities between boundary phonemes”. Kelly (1998: 586) finds that “breakpoints in blends do not fall randomly. Rather, they cluster at major phonological joints, such as syllable, rime, and onset boundaries”. Similarly, Gries (2004) claims that “the most prototypical examples of blends involve linear blending with a shortening of both source words at some point of (graphemic or phonemic) overlap” (Gries 2004: 645) and that there is a “strong graphemic influence on blend formation” (Gries 2004: 656).

However, as the analysis below will show, the attempts to analyse acronyms, blends and clippings as sub-categories of each other or in terms of their orthographical and/or phonological make-up is not convincing. In each of the three non-morphematic word-formation processes under discussion, we can identify specific submorphemic elements which are involved in their formation and contribute in various ways to their subtypes: initials, splinters and free splinters. Therefore, the next sections will discuss the contributions made by

¹⁵² Incidentally, Plag’s analysis of *smog* and *modem* makes no mention of overlap (see also below).

slang-formations, such as *snafu* ('situation normal, all fouled up'), *TGIF* ('Thank God It's Friday') and *OTT* ('over-the-top'). Innovative and ironic pronunciations also occur, as the following example demonstrates:

These are the men and women of the year-old Terrorist Threat Integration Center (TTIC). ... Each day, officials at TTIC (pronounced *tee-tic*) examine 5,000 to 6,000 pieces of intelligence ... (*Time*, 29 March 2004, p. 33).

Acronyms 'behave' like normal lexemes, that is, they can be inflected, as Pinker (1999: 28) observes:

[...] acronyms, like phrases, can turn into bona fide words as a language evolves, as in *TV*, *VCR*, *UFO*, *SOB*, and *PC*. Once an acronym has become a word there is no reason not to treat it as a word, including adding a plural suffix to it. Would anyone really talk about *three JP* (justices of the peace), *five POW* (prisoners of war), or *nine SOB* (sons of bitches)?

In addition, acronyms can themselves become parts of new, multiple formations, as exemplified in Figure 1 below.

Acronymy	SCR
Blending	ABB, AIM, InteracTV, No-K., Y2.1K
(Multiple) Compounding	CD-Rom joint venture
Conversion	To R.S.V.P, to TKO
Prefixation	Un-PC
Suffixation	Foi-able, MSTies, OK-ness

Figure 1: Examples of Multiple Word-Formations Containing Acronyms

According to Wales (1991: 5), "[i]t is fashionable to suggest a word already in the language, and one which is humorous or punningly appropriate (e.g. CISSY: 'Campaign to Impede Sexual Stereotyping in the Young')." Forms like CISSY take advantage of the fact that, in many cases, the full forms of acronyms are often lost rather quickly; this can be exploited through the formation of consciously formed 'reverse' acronyms which are homonymous (or, sometimes, homophonous) with existing words (see also Ungerer 1991a and 1991b). Reverse acronyms, such as ABC, PLAN, whizzo and yummys are playful and ironic and have a strong mnemonic effect. This loss of primary motivation through the severed link between the full form and the acronym is evident in compounds such as PIN ('personal identification number') number and PESP ('Pre-Entry Science Programme') programme. The pleonastic repetition of one element of the acronym as head of the new compound is a clear indication that speakers are not aware of the underlying phrase which formed the basis of the acronym.

Thus initials, the smallest graphemic units in the English language, are the building blocks for one of the most creative word-formation processes in the language. As we have seen, initials represent entire words – that is, they are not, strictly speaking, 'meaningful units'. This frequently leads to loss of primary motivation. Maybe it is this 'independence' of initials which permits language users to form creative new lexemes and which leads to the common loss of primary motivation, thus opening the door for homonymy, reinterpretation and irony.

4. Blends and splinters

Both acronyms and blends are popular in electronic communication: “It is not uncommon for new technical terms to be created by blending” (Stockwell & Minkova 2001: 6; see also Fandrych 2007 for a more detailed discussion). The name ‘blending’ is metaphorical, as blends ‘mix’ random parts of existing lexemes (‘splinters’) – structurally and semantically – and there is the additional semantic component BLENDING/MIXTURE. In this sense, they are iconic as their forms reflect their referents.

Most blends (also ‘portmanteau-words’ from French *portmanteau* – ‘suitcase’, ‘coat-carrier’) consist of two elements, a characteristic which places them in the vicinity of compounds (see Marchand 1969: 451: “compounding by means of curtailed words”) – but, unlike compounds, their constituents are not full morphemes but parts of lexemes which makes them more irregular and unpredictable. Kreidler (1994: 5029f) defines blending as follows:

Sometimes two words are clipped simultaneously and united to form a ‘blend’. The two source words may be syntagmatically related ... or paradigmatically related. ... Many blends ... are consciously composed. Formations like these are now much favored in advertising and in the popular press.

Blending involves “telescoping”, usually overlap, and “there must be some shortening of the source items” (Cannon 2000: 952) and “... the fusing usually occurs at a syllabic juncture, though the phonemic sharing by both splinters somewhat blurs this fact” (Cannon 2000: 953). McArthur (1992: 137) includes hyphenated formations like *hi-tech* (or *high-tec*) under blends. However, in my opinion, such formations lack the crucial precondition for blends: the iconic mixing of splinters (see above), as the hyphen actually separates the two constituents. Following Fandrych (2004: 28), I propose to classify hyphenated forms such as these as ‘clipped compounds’¹⁵⁵. According to Plag (2003: 121), blending is “best described in terms of prosodic categories”, and “[o]nly syllabic constituents as a whole can be deleted” (Plag 2003: 123) – a bold statement that I would not agree with. Plag’s description seems rather mechanistic:

[...] blends behave semantically and syntactically like copulative compounds and their phonological make-up is characterized by three restrictions. The first is that the initial part of the first word is combined with the final part of the second word. Secondly, blends only combine syllable constituents (onsets, nuclei, codas, rimes, or complete syllables), and thirdly, the size of blends (measured in terms of syllables) is determined by the second element. (Plag 2003: 125)

Blends are less transparent than compounds and many blends are used for attention-catching purposes in advertising and journalism, and these are often short-lived (Adams 2001: 141). Blends are popular because of their creativity. According to Stockwell & Minkova (2001: 7), “[b]lending is an area of word formation where cleverness can be rewarded by instant popularity”. Crystal (1995: 130) agrees that “[b]lending seems to have increased in popularity in the 1980s, being increasingly used in commercial and advertising contexts ... but how many of them will still be around in a decade remains an open question”.

¹⁵⁵ With the exception of graphic blends, such as *absa-lute* (see below).

The term ‘splinter’ has been proposed for the constituents of blends – a metaphor which aptly expresses their irregular shape. The term was originally introduced by Berman (1961: 279) who used this term to define blends:

Thus Blending or Telescoping can be defined as such a process of coining new words under which a blend is formed by adding the splinter of the last initial word to the stem or to the shortened substitute of the stem of the first initial word (words). As we see, blends cannot be looked upon as units lying within the limits of one of the fixed structural types of word-building. It is their peculiar structure that distinguishes them from any other word structures. (Berman 1961: 279f; emphasis in original)

With slight modifications, this term is then adopted by Adams (1973: 142, 149ff, 188ff) who states that splinters are neither morphemes nor ‘compound-elements’:

Usually splinters are irregular in form, that is, they are parts of morphs, though in some cases there is no formal irregularity, but a special relationship of meaning between the splinter and some ‘regular’ word in which it occurs. (Adams 1973: 142)

Adams¹⁵⁶ (1973: 142) follows Berman (1961): “Words containing splinters I shall call blends”.

The term ‘splinter’, is developed further by Soudek (1978) who distinguishes between ‘initial splinters’ and ‘final splinters’; initial splinters may be the first or the second element, while final splinters can only become the second element of blends. Overlaps, for example, *motel*, often result from the merging of initial and final splinters. Splinters can even give rise to new morphological units through reanalysis, such as *-gate* (from *Watergate* in *Clinterngate*, *Yuppiegate*) and *-(o)holic* (from *alcoholic* in *workaholic*, *shopaholic*, *foodaholic*) (see also Adams 2001: 139f, Haspelmath 2002: 56, and Lehrer 1998).

López Rúa’s (2002) analysis of blends also involves the term ‘splinter’, which she defines as follows:

I [...] regard as splinters those graphic and phonemic sequences (not only in blends but also in peripheral initialisms) which are neither inflectional nor derivational morphemes, nor combining forms (electro-, -scope), and whose length generally allows their identification as belonging to a previous word. Consequently, splinters tend to be syllables or units larger than syllables in their sources, as *Ox-* and *-bridge* in *Oxbridge* (‘OXford and CamBRIDGE), or *Digi-* and *-alt* in *Digiralt* (‘DIGItal radar ALTimeter’). When they are shorter than syllables, their constituents are the syllable onset (i.e. the prevocalic consonant or consonants); the onset and the nucleus (prevocalic consonants + vowel); or the rhyme (vowel + postvocalic consonants or coda). (López Rúa 2002: 37f)

In most cases, initial splinters form the first part of the blend, and final splinters become the tail. There are exceptions, however: in *modem*, the initial splinter *dem* [< *demodulator*] constitutes the tail; and while *modem* combines two initial splinters, *Kongfrontation*, consists of two final splinters. The most common pattern is the combination of initial splinter

¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, Adams seems to have abandoned the concept of ‘splinter’ in her later work; in her 2001 publication, she does not mention splinters any more. Instead, she analyses blending as reanalysis. (Adams 2001: 138f).

followed by a final splinter¹⁵⁷, often with overlap, as in *motel* (see Algeo 1977 and Soudek 1978), and “[...] the splinter of the initial source word is as likely to receive prominence as is the splinter of the terminal source word” (Cannon 2000: 953). However, there are also cases of blends which incorporate entire unshortened words, usually with overlap, for example, *thinspirations* and *WAPathy*.

Depending on their structure, blends can be classified into a number of sub-types; these are presented in Figure 2 below.

initial and final splinter with overlap	<i>affluenza, burpulence, celebutante, pong</i>
two initial splinters with overlap	<i>modem</i>
two final splinters with overlap	<i>Kongfrontation</i>
overlap of full words (‘telescope’)	<i>thinspirations, WAPathy</i>
initial splinter + full word with overlap	<i>AIM, Coca-Colonization, emoticon, Gautrain</i>
final splinter + full word with overlap	<i>netiquette</i>
full word + final splinter with overlap	<i>adultescent, gundamentalist, himbo</i>
insertion of one word into the other, with overlap	<i>Clinterngate, Y2.1K</i>
more than two constituents	<i>burpulence, Clinterngate, SMART</i>
graphic blends	<i>absa-lutely, Inglish, InteracTV, Lo-CALL, opporTOMist, royoil, suisside, WAPathy</i>

Fig. 2: Types of Blends

With the exception of graphic blends, which **only exist** in their written forms, blends clearly originate in the oral medium: especially in those cases where there is overlap, the telescoping of **phonetically similar** parts of words, as in *affluenza, celebutante, gundamentalist* etc., suggests that the large majority of blends were first created orally before they were fixed in writing.

While larger than initials, splinters also **represent** the words for which they stand: semantically, splinters contribute the entire meaning of their source words to the new lexeme mixtures, the blends. Their irregular shapes, combined with unorthodox blending methods, result in innovative and unconventional new lexemes which are often funny and attention-catching – qualities that are exploited in advertising and in journalism.

5. Clippings, clipped compounds and free splinters

Marchand (1969: 441) defines clipping as “the reduction of a word to one of its parts. ... [T]he clipped part is not a morpheme in the linguistic system (nor is the clipped result, for that matter), but an arbitrary part of the word form”. Bauer (1988: 33) is also doubtful about the

¹⁵⁷ According to Aitchison (2003: 138) sounds at the beginnings and the ends of words are retrieved more easily from the mental lexicon; this might be an explanation for the popularity of blends which consist of initial splinters and final splinters.

status of clipping: “Since the parts that are deleted in clipping are not clearly morphs in any sense, it is not necessarily the case that clipping is a part of morphology, although it is a way of forming new lexemes.”

In my opinion, clipping is certainly a word-formation process: in many cases, we witness semantic disassociation¹⁵⁸, for example, in *exam*, *pants* and *pub*, or clippings move to different registers or styles as compared to their long equivalents, for example, *ad*, *apps* (< *applications*), and *prof.* Bauer (1988: 33) also observes that “clipping frequently does change the stylistic value of the word.” An outwardly visible sign of this disassociation can be new spellings, such as *Aussie* and *loony* (see below). Due to semantic disassociation, clipping is sometimes used for euphemistic or obfuscatory purposes, as in *Mia*, an in-group term used by young women afflicted with bulimia in their chatrooms. In addition, clippings can become constituents of new, multiple, formations, for example, *blogging* and *lad mag*.

Kreidler (1979: 26) notes that clipping means the “subtraction of material which is not obviously morphemic”, while Plag (2003: 22) hypothesizes that clipping (or ‘truncation’) is “the process of deleting material itself which is the morph”, thus possibly even necessitating a new morpheme definition: “Truncation is a process in which the relationship between a derived word and its base is expressed by the lack of phonetic material in the derived word” (Plag 2003: 116). In view of the obvious irregularity of clipping – morpheme boundaries are often ignored –, Plag’s analysis is hardly convincing: certainly, in the formation of *photog* < *photographer* (as distinct from *photo* < *photograph*), neither morpheme nor syllable boundaries were observed, nor are the second constituents of the clipped compounds *lad mag* and *midrats* determined by any such boundaries.

Usually, it is relatively long words (that is, words consisting of at least two or three syllables) that are clipped. Fore-clipping (for example, *photog* and *temp*) is the most common type, followed by back-clipping (*blog*, *graph*, *ism*, *phone*) and back- and fore-clipping (*flu*, *fridge*). Mid-clipping (*Jo’burg* or *Jo’bg*) is rare, and written clippings never leave the written domain, that is, when read aloud, their full forms replace the shortening, such as *abbr* and *esp.* Interestingly, written clippings can become parts of new combinations, and then they are pronounceable as clippings, for example, *Atty-Gen* < *Attorney-General*. Clipped compounds are shortenings of long combinations, which keep one constituent unshortened, as in *lad mag* and *SimEarth* < *Simulation Earth*). Further characteristics include the maintenance of plurals (*apps* and *specs*), informal spellings (*loony* < *lunatic*), and cases of new pronunciation and stress movement (*‘Aussie* [-z-] < *Aus’tralian* [-st-]).

Clipping shares a large degree of arbitrariness with blending: it neither considers stress nor syllable or morpheme structures. Rather extreme examples which demonstrate this disregard for stress and syllable boundaries are *blog* from *weblog* and *photog* from *photographer*. Therefore, one might argue that the results of clippings are ‘free splinters’¹⁵⁹, that is, independent elements which remain after a radical shortening process. Another feature that is unique to clipping is that clipping is pure shortening: unlike acronymy and blending, the shortening process is not accompanied by expansion.

While initials in acronyms are bound elements, and the same is true of splinters in blends, clipping, as a subtractive process, “sets splinters free”; as irregular parts of words from which they originated, they undergo a process of semantic and stylistic disassociation (often

¹⁵⁸ See also Fandrych’s (2004: 31) mini-experiment around *exam*, which showed that *exam* is used in the sense of a ‘test of knowledge’ as opposed to *examination* in the sense of a ‘doctor’s examination’.

¹⁵⁹ The concept ‘free splinter’ is proposed here in analogy to the term ‘free morpheme’ (as opposed to the ‘bound splinter’ in blending and the ‘bound morpheme’ in affixation).

See also Lehrer (1996: 362; 1998: 4 and 16), who notes that splinters can become new word-formation elements, such as combining forms, and eventually even morphemes.

accompanied by phonetic and/or graphemic changes) which can result in their complete emancipation: cases such as *pants*, *pub*, *bus* and the more recent *blog* are examples of clippings which have all but severed their ties with the lexemes on which they were based. Like free morphemes, these **free splinters** can contribute to new, multiple formations.

6. Conclusion

Despite their frequent marginalisation, acronyms, blends and clippings are interesting cases of seemingly irregular structures. Morphemes do not play a role in their formation; instead, these processes make use of a whole gamut of submorphemic elements, ranging from mere initials, groups of letters, syllables and splinters to full (not infrequently even complex) words. For their analysis, there is a need for a more flexible approach than mere morpheme analysis, and for concepts below the level of the traditional “smallest meaningful elements”. This study has proposed the use of three submorphemic concepts for the analysis of non-morphematic word-formation processes: **initials** in the case of acronymy, **(bound) splinters** in the case of blending, and **free splinters** in the case of clipping.

In view of their unorthodox structures, it is not surprising that the apparent irregularity of form of acronyms, blends and clippings opens the door for creativity and playfulness, irony and unconventionality. Their resulting originality is attention-catching and is often exploited in advertising and headlines. This is one of the reasons why acronyms, blends and clippings have enjoyed an unprecedented popularity and productivity in English in recent decades. Admittedly, they are not always welcome in more formal registers, that is, they are stylistically marked. However, in advertising, in the media and in modern technology, they have firmly established themselves. In order to capture these socio-pragmatic and textual aspects, one will, however, have to go beyond a structural analysis and take usage-related aspects into account.

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Appendix: Examples used in the study¹⁶⁰

ITEM	WF Type	WF Subtype
ABB < ASEA + BBC	blend	from acronyms
ABC = 'A Better Chance' [program]	acronym	homonymy/reverse
ABSA = 'Amalgamated Banks of South Africa'	acronym	
absa-lutely < ABSA + absolutely	blend	from acronym, graphic
adulescent < adult + adolescent	blend	overlap
advertorial < advertisement + editorial	blend	overlap
affluenza < affluence + influenza	blend	overlap
AIM < AOL ['America Online'] + IM ['Instant Messenger']	blend	from acronyms
Ana < anorexia	clipping	fore
Animania < animal + mania	blend	overlap
apps < applications	clipping	fore
blog < weblog	clipping	back
broccoflower < broccoli + cauliflower	blend	
burbulence < burp + burble + turbulence	blend	overlap
CD-Rom joint venture	compound	from acronyms
celebutante < celebrity + debutante	blend	overlap
Clinterngate < Clinton + intern + [Water]gate	blend	overlap, 3 constituents, from names
Clintessence < Clint [Eastwood] + quintessence	blend	overlap, from name
clone-dren < clone (s) + children	blend	graphic
Coca-Colonization < Coca Cola + colonization	blend	overlap, graphic
Cowsteau < cow + Cousteau	blend	overlap, from name
Demo-Crazy < democracy + crazy	blend	graphic
emoticon < emotive + icon	blend	overlap
Epcot = 'Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow'	acronym	
EP-X = 'Efficient Personal Experimental'	acronym	
ESPRIT = 'European Strategic Programme for Research and Development in Information Technology'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
FBI = 'Federal Bureau of Investigation' - Fibbies	acronym	phoneticised
FLIR = 'forward-looking infrared system'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
fluffragette < fluff + suffragette	blend	overlap
FOI-able = 'Freedom of Information Act + available'	suffixation	from acronym
Franglais < Francais + Anglais	blend	overlap
Frenglish < French + English	blend	overlap
Gautrain < Gauteng (Sesotho Johannesburg/Pretoria) + train	blend	overlap
graph < paragraph	clipping	back
gundamentalist < gun + fundamentalist	blend	overlap
himbo < him + bimbo	blend	overlap
Imagineer < imagine + engineer	blend	overlap
Inglish < Indian English	blend	graphic
INSPASS = 'Immigration and Naturalization Service Passenger Accelerated Service System'	acronym	partial homonymy
InteracTV	blend	graphic, from acronym

¹⁶⁰ This collection is based on the Fandrych (2004) corpus. The original corpus was compiled over a period of several years, using examples from everyday linguistic encounters in the United Kingdom, the United States and Southern Africa. The extract presented here has been amended slightly. For the purposes of this study, it is used as a "quarry" from which to draw examples.

intrapreneur < intra + entrepreneur	blend	overlap
INXS = 'in excess' (pop group)	acronym	phonetic/graphic
IPO = 'initial public offerings'	acronym	
Jo'burg, Jo'bg < Johannesburg	clipping	mid
killboard < kill + billboard	blend	overlap
Kongfrontation < [King] Kong + confrontation	blend	overlap
lad mag < lad + magazine	clipped compound	
Lo-CALL < local + low [cost] + [phone] call	clipped compound	graphic
Los Diego < Los Angeles + San Diego	clipped compound	
metrosexual < metropolis + hetero-/homosexual	blend	
Mia < bulimia	clipping	back
Miamamerican < Miami + American	blend	overlap
Microsortof < Microsoft + sort of	blend	from name + phrase
midrats < midnight rations	clipped compound	
MISHAP = 'Missiles High-Speed Assembly Program'	Acronym	rearranged sequence
Moab = 'Massive Ordnance Air Blast'; 'Mother Of All Bombs'	acronym	reinterpretation
mockumentary < mock + documentary	blend	overlap
modem < modulator + demodulator	blend	2 initial splinters, overlap
MST = 'Magical Science Theatre'	acronym	
MSTies [mIsti:z] < MST + -ies	suffixation	from acronym
MUD = 'Multi-User Dungeon'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
Muppets < marionette + puppet	blend	overlap
NAFTA = 'North American Free Trade Agreement'	acronym	
netiquette < [Inter]net + etiquette	blend	overlap
NIMBY = 'not in my backyard'	acronym	
No-K. = 'not OK'	blend	from acronym
Nuyorican < New York[er] + [Puerto] Rican	blend	overlap
NWO = 'New World Order'	acronym	
OK-ness < OK + -ness	suffixation	from acronym
OpporTOMist < opportunist + [Uncle] Tom	blend	graphic
OTT = 'over-the-top'	acronym	
PIN = 'personal identification number'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
outercourse < out + intercourse	blend	overlap
PESP = 'Pre-Entry Science Programme'	acronym	
photog < photographer	clipping	fore
pix < pics < pictures	clipping	fore, respelling
PLAN = 'Prevent Los Angelization Now'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
plunget < plunge + plummet	blend	overlap
pong < poetry + song	blend	overlap
QBO = 'quasi-biennial oscillation'	acronym	
Qualiflyer < qualify/ier + fly/ier	blend	overlap
QUANGO, quango = 'Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisation'	acronym	from acronym
royoil [royalties] < royal + oil [royalties]	blend	overlap, graphic
Ruthanasia > Richardson + euthanasia	blend	
SAREIN = 'Southern African Renewable Energy Information Network'	acronym	partial homophony
SCR = 'Soweto Community Radio'	acronym	from acronym
Sdoos < SDUs = 'self-defence units'	acronym	respelling
SERMS = 'selective estrogen response modulators'	acronym	quasi-homonymy
sexiled < sex + exiled	blend	overlap
SHARP = 'SkinHeads Against Racial Prejudice'	acronym	homonymy/reverse

SimEarth < Simulation Earth	clipped compound	
SMART = 'Swatch, Mercedes & art'	blend	3 constituents
Soweto = "South-Western Townships"	acronym	syllabic
specs < spectacles; specifications	clipping	fore
Spoos < SPUs = 'self-protection units'	acronym	respelling
stalkerazzi < stalk + paparazzi	blend	overlap
suisside < Suisse + suicide	blend	graphic, overlap
SUV = 'sport-utility vehicle'	acronym	
tax avoision < tax avoidance + [tax] evasion	compound	from blend
TCK = 'Third Culture Kids'	acronym	
thinspirations < thin + inspiration/aspirations	blend	overlap
to celeb < celeb	conversion	from clipping
to e < to e-mail < electronic mail	conversion	from multiple clippings
to okay < okay < o.k. < O.K.	conversion	from respelled acronym
to R.S.V.P.; R.S.V.P.ed < répondez, s'il-vous-plaît	conversion	from acronym
to temp < temp	conversion	from clipping
to TKO < technical KO ('knock-out')	conversion	from acronym
tofurkey < tofu + turkey	blend	overlap
top = 'termination of pregnancy'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
touron < tourist + moron	blend	overlap
TTIC = 'Terrorist Threat Information Center'	acronym	pronunciation ['ti:tlk]
un-PC = 'politically incorrect'	prefixation	from acronym
VoS = 'Voice of Soweto'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
WAP = 'wireless access protocol'	acronym	
WAPathy < WAP + apathy	blend	from acronym, overlap, graphic
weborexia < web + anorexia	blend	
whizzo < WSO ('weapons system officer')	acronym	respelling
Wimp [way] = 'windows, icons, menus and point-and-click'	acronym	homonymy/reverse
WLSA = 'Women and Law in Southern Africa'	acronym	
WMC = 'White Male Candidate'	acronym	
XS ['eks 'es] < excess [Ik'ses] (name of aftershave)	acronym	phonetic/graphic
Y2.1K [compliant] < Year 2000 + 2.1 [engine] [compliant]	blend	from acronym
Y-CHOPS = 'Young Community Home-Owning Parents'	acronym	graphic
yummies = 'young upwardly mobile Marxists' + ies	acronym	homonymy/reverse