

مدى إلمام طلاب السنة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة البعث بالبحث والاختصار في اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية

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ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى معرفة مدى إلمام طلاب وطالبات السنة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة البعث بالبحث والاختصار في اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية. وتتبع هذه الدراسة مقارنة مقارنة وتسلط الضوء بشكل خاص على ظاهرتي البحث والاختصار. لكنها أيضاً تشتمل على استبيان هدفه هو معرفة سبب استعمال عينة البحث للبحث والمختصرات على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. وأظهرت النتائج أن عينة البحث تتمتع بمعرفة جيدة بعمليتي البحث والاختصار في اللغة الإنكليزية، لكن معرفتهم بالبحث والاختصار في اللغة العربية غير مرضية. علاوة على ذلك، دلت نتائج الاستبيان أن معظم الطلبة في عينة البحث يفضلون استعمال المنحوتات والمختصرات على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي. ختاماً، تقترح هذه الدراسة أن

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في جامعة البعث بالنحت والاختصار في اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية

على معلمي اللغة الإنكليزية في سوريا تشجيع طلابهم على تعلم عمليتي
النحت والاختصار بشكل أوسع خارج غرفة الصف.

The Familiarity of Fourth-year Students of English at Al-Ba'ath University with Blending and Acronymy in English and Arabic

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to test the familiarity of the fourth-year students at the English Department at Al-Ba'ath University with blends and acronyms in both English and Arabic. Following a contrastive approach, this paper focuses on blending. It includes a short survey, the aim of which is to find why the research samples would use blends and acronyms in social media. The analysis of the data shows that the testees had satisfactory competence in English blends and acronyms. Their competence in Arabic blends and acronyms, on the other hand, is unsatisfactory. Moreover, the majority of the testees preferred using blends and acronyms in social media. The paper concludes with suggesting that teachers of English in Syria should encourage students to learn more about blending and acronymy and to continue learning on their own after leaving the classroom.

Key words: blending, blends, acronymy, acronyms, word-formation

1. Introduction

While syntax is concerned with how words are arranged into constructions, morphology is concerned with the forms of words themselves. According to Bauer (1983) and Quirk et al. (1985), word-formation is generally divided into two main groups: predictable and unpredictable formations. Bauer (1983, p. 33) observes that "word formation deals with the formation of new lexemes". Ungerer (2010, p. 650) argues that word-formation, loosely defined as "creating new words from existing words ranges from prefixation and suffixation (where it overlaps with inflectional morphology in the use of bound morphemes) to processes not even reflected in the phonological form of the item involved (for example, conversion); word-formation borders on purely semantic processes of metaphor and metonymy. Between these two extremes, the many ways in which words can be combined, may be placed, fused, and condensed (as in compounds, lexical blends, back-formations, clippings, and acronyms)". Yule (2006, p. 64) defines word formation processes "as the study of the processes whereby new words come into being in a language". These processes enlarge the vocabulary and therefore create new lexemes. By dividing the phrase 'word formation processes' into its

components, the term almost explains itself, namely 'the processes of the formation of words'. Thus, this may be a very appropriate definition (Tahaineh, 2012).

According to Bauer (1983) and Quirk et al. (1985), word-formation is generally divided into two main groups. The first group includes affixation (derivation), compounding and conversion, which are considered predictable formations, whereas the second group includes what Bauer (1983) and Plag (2002) call the unpredictable formations, such as clipping, blending, acronyms, etc. The word formation processes researched in this paper are blending and acronymy, which are discussed in section 7.

2. Statement of the problem

The main problem addressed in this paper is the difficulties that students of English at Al-Ba'ath University encounter in the study of two-word formation processes, namely blending and acronymy.

3. Significance of the study

The use of and blending and acronymy has rapidly increased in almost all aspects of life. Acronyms, particularly in English, have become so frequent to the extent that one can hardly read a daily newspaper or magazine or listen to a broadcast without

encountering many of them. They have become very convenient to use and well-suited to the needs of our highly technical society that seeks economy in almost all aspects of life. The tendency to economize has been clearly manifested in the use of acronyms, initialisms and abbreviations in both modes of communication, i.e. speaking and writing. As for blending, it is anything but a new phenomenon in human language. However, it is only over the last couple of decades that blending has become a very popular word-formation process. Today, in English and Arabic a large number of blends can be found which are no longer recognized as such since they have been in everyday use for a long time. This can be explained by the fact that blends tend to be abbreviations in the beginning and, due to their word-like appearance, are lexicalized through the passage of time.

4. Research questions

This paper aims at answering two questions. First, are students familiar with blends and acronyms in English and Arabic? Second, what are the reasons behind using blends and acronyms in social media?

5. Objectives of the study

This paper attempts to find out the reasons behind using blending and acronymy in both English and Arabic by students of English at Al-Ba'ath University. It also defines the development history of word formation processes. This paper follows a contrastive analysis of blending and acronyms both in English and Arabic that would be helpful in identifying differences and similarities between two languages. It aims at constituting a helpful reference.

6. Limitations of the study

There are two limitations of this study. First, it examines only two-word formation processes, namely blends and acronyms, in terms of their semantic scope. Second, the research sample is restricted to fourth-year students of English at Al-Ba'ath University.

7. Literature Review

This section covers the relevant terms, definitions and classifications of both blending and acronyms. It covers blending and acronyms in English and Arabic. It also highlights some similarities in blending and acronymy formation in both languages.

7.1 Blending

Blending is the process whereby two lexical elements which do not normally co-occur according to the rules of the language are combined within a single linguistic unit (Crystal, 2008). The initial part of the first word plus the final part of the second word is the common type of blending. In English, many words are produced accordingly, as shown in the word *brunch* (derived from the two words *breakfast* + *lunch*).

The other type is the initial letters of the first word with no deletion at all in the second word, as in *Medicare*, which is derived from *medical* plus *care*. Sometimes, the first word is kept as a whole without any deletion, while the final letters of the second word are used to form the blend, as in *beefaroni* (*beef* + *macaroni*) (Abdulsalam, 2008).

7.1.1 Blending in English

There are many types of blends, based on how they are formed. Algeo (1977) points out that blends that can be divided into three groups: Phonemic overlap, new blends with clipping phonemic overlap and clipping.

7.1.1.1 Phonemic Overlap

This is the process whereby a syllable or part of a syllable is shared between two words. The most common pattern is the one where the final part of the first word overlaps the first part

of the second word. The overlap can be one phoneme or several. Blends with overlapping may also include all of one form and the first or last part of the other word. In those cases, it is the spelling of the word that tells us it is a blend. This group is subdivided on the basis of (i) where and what kind of shortening and overlap occurs and (ii) whether the phonemic overlap is one of full segments or one of distinctive articulatory features as shown in the following examples in Table 1.

<i>Slanguage</i>	<i>Slang + language</i>	<i>Language that is characterized by excessive use of slangs</i>
<i>Sexpert</i>	<i>Sex+ expert</i>	<i>an expert in sexual affairs</i>

Table 1. New blends with overlapping

7.1.1.2 New Blends with Clipping

Crystal (2008) observes that this process involves the shortening of two words and then compounding them. In other words, clippings are reductions of longer forms, usually removing the end of the word, sometimes the beginning or the middle.

There are three main kinds of clipping in English: back clipping, fore-clipping and medial clipping. Back clipping is

the most common type, in which the beginning is retained. The unclipped original may be either a simple or a composite. Examples are: ad (advertisement) and cable (cablegram) (James; 1988; Ljung, 2003). Fore-clipping retains the final part. Examples are: fro (afro), loid (celluloid), (raccoon), gator (alligator), and phone (telephone) (James; 1988; James, 2009). In medial clipping, the middle of the word is retained. Examples are: flu (influenza) and fridge (refrigerator) (Bauer, 1983; Stageberg and Oaks, 2000).

7.1.1.3 Phonemic Overlap and Clipping

This means the shortening of two words to a shared syllable and then compounding, as illustrated in the following Table:

<i>The word</i>	<i>Blending process</i>	<i>The meaning</i>
<i>Californiacation</i>	<i>californi(a) + fornicat (e)</i>	<i>It is an American comedy-drama television series by Tom Kapinos.</i>
<i>Pomato</i>	<i>po(t)ato + (to) mato</i>	<i>a hybrid or chimera produced by grafting a tomato plant and a potato plant, both of which are members of the Solanaceae.</i>

Table 2. New Blends with Clipping and Overlapping

7.1.2 Blending in Arabic

Sayeed (1995) observes that blends produced in Arabic are often made from the initial letters of the first word and the final letters of the second word as shown in the set of words:

- i. Sea surfing [rakmaja] = mawja (sea tide)+ ruku:b (riding)
- ii. Setting [zamka:n] = za:man (time) + maka:n (place)

Moreover, Farghall and Shakir (2001) note that blends could be formed from a single word with no deletion plus a single letter in the second word. This applies to the words حمدة (Praise be to Allah) and بسملة (In the name of Allah). In both of these words, the first word whether حمد or بسم is attached to the medial letter in the word لله , that is ل , in addition to ة which is a nominal suffix.

There are several types of blends in Arabic, such as verbal, adjectival, nominal, relational and borrowed blends. In verbal blending, a single verb is coined from a whole sentence to denote either its utterance by someone, or the occurrence of its

meaning, as in *jafada* from *julmūd* + *jamada* which means *brave* in English . In adjectival blending a new single adjective is coined from two words to intensify their attributive load or to denote a new attribute, as in $s^{\text{c}}alada + s^{\text{c}}amada = s^{\text{c}}aldama$. Nominal blending, moreover, allows the derivation of a new noun from two words, e.g. $jalada + jamada = julmu:d$. Furthermore, an increasing number of new blends in Modern Arabic are borrowed from blends that are found in other languages, especially English, as in *Eurasia* and *petrochemicals*.

7.2 Acronymy

Bolinger (1968, p. 116) uses the term acronym to refer to "the combined pronunciation of the initial letters of composite names" that relate to social and political organizations. Such names, Bolinger notes, that may be pronounced letter by letter as in *FBI*, or merged as in *NATO*. However, he does not explain the reasons that may have motivated each type of pronunciation. Hornby (1974) defines acronymy as a "word formed from the initial letters of a name." Akmajian et al. (1984, p. 69) view acronymization as "just one of the processes of abbreviation, or shortening". It involves the selection of the first letters of the words of a phrase, as in *radar* which derives

from 'Radio Detecting and Ranging', and *laser* which stands for 'Light Amplified by Stimulated Emission of Radiation'.

7.2.1 Acronymy in English

As found in Spencer & Zwicky (1998) and Plag (1998), among others, English acronym formation] follows certain mechanisms. These are listed below:

- i. Selecting the initial letters of all content words of the source phrase (henceforth SP); the initial letters of function words, if any, are ignored, as in:
 - (1) KAR from Knot Area Ratio
 - (2) SHAPE from Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe
- ii. Selecting the initial letter of each word of the SP, regardless of whether it is a content or a function word, as in:
 - (3) DOLS from Department of Linguistic Science
- iii. Selecting the initial letter or letters of some content words of the SP and ignoring others, as in:
 - (4) CORE from Computer Readable Catalogue
 - (5) COMECON from Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
- iv. Selecting the initial letter of each content word of the SP except for the last one where both the initial and final letters are selected, as in:

(6) ANZACS from Australian and New Zealand Army Corps

(7) LINK from Lambeth Information Network

The selection of the final letter of *Corps* in (6) is meant to show that the acronym refers to the various branches of the two armies, whereas the selection of the final letter of *Network* in (7) produced a homonym of a word that relates semantically to the function of the SP.

- v. Selecting the initial letter of each content word of the SP including the components of compound words, as in:

(8) SLWOP from Special Leave Without Pay

(9) AWOL from Away Without Leave

- vi. Borrowing a foreign (or non-English) acronym (e.g. from French) and forming an English phrase that shares initial letters with the SP, as in:

(10) FIFA from Football International Federation Association.

7.2.2 Acronymy in Arabic

Examination of Arabic acronyms by Alsamarrai (1987) and Abu Salim (1997) shows that a number of mechanisms are employed in the formation of these acronyms. Below is a list of them with examples.

- i. Selecting the initial letter or letters of each content word of the SP, as in أمل from ʔafwaaj ʔal-muqaawama ʔal-

- lubnaaniyya (Lebanese Resistance Regiments) and حماس from hamaas harakat ʔal-muqaawama ʔal-ʔislaamiyya (Islamic Resistance Movement).
- ii. Selecting the initial letters of some content words of the SP and ignoring others, as in حشد from hizb ʔash-shaʕb ʔad-diimuqraati ʔal-ʔurduni (Jordanian People's Democratic Party) and وعد from ʔal-hizb ʔal-wahdawi ʔal-ʕarabi ʔad-diimuqraati (Democratic Arab Unionist Party).
- iii. Selecting the initial letters of some or all content words of the SP and reversing their order, as in فتح harakat ʔat-tahriir ʔal-watani ʔal-filastiini (Palestinian National Liberation Movement) and فدا ʔal ʔittihaad ʔad-diimuqraati ʔal-filastiini (Palestinian Democratic Union).
- iv. Selecting the initial letter of each content word and reordering the letters to produce a semantically acceptable word, as in: وفا wakaalat ʔal-ʔanbaaʔ ʔal-filastiiniyya (Palestinian News Agency).

7.2.3 Similarities between acronyms in English and Arabic

Hamdan and Fareh (2003) list the following similarities in acronym-formation between English Arabic:

- i. Most acronyms in Arabic and English are formed by the application of the same mechanism, i.e. the selection of the initial letter or letters of the content words of the SP.
- ii. Both languages tend to ignore function words in forming acronyms unless their initial letters are necessary to the formation of a semantically or phonologically acceptable word.
- iii. The formation of independent-word acronyms in both English and Arabic tends to reflect the interests, goals or philosophy of the acronym generators.

8. Methodology and Data Collection

The methodology followed in this paper is quantitative. Rizai (2016) observes that in quantitative research, data is collected from a group of people and is then statistically analyzed in order to understand a certain phenomenon. Indeed, there are more blends and acronyms in both English and Arabic that are not mentioned in this study. Also, the examples in this study follow the main rules of formation of blends and acronyms in both English and Arabic. Quantitative researchers regard reality as objective and independent of the researcher, i.e., they do not interfere with the topic being researched.

This paper aims at finding out to what extent students of English at Al-Ba'ath are familiar with English and Arabic blends and acronyms. It also seeks to understand the reasons why students use blends and acronyms in social media. To do this, a fill-in-the-gap test and a short survey of five questions are used.

8.1 Fill-in-the-gap test

The aim of this exercise was to find out whether or not the participants were familiar with blends and acronyms in Arabic and English. Here, students were required to fill in the gaps with the correct answer from the given options (see subsection 9.1).

8.2 Reasons why students use blends and acronyms in social media

This survey includes five questions about blends and acronyms. The aim here is to find out reasons about using blends and acronyms in social media. It consists of the following questions below:

1. Why do you use an acronym such as (BRB., DYK, BTW, FYI) while chatting in social media?

2. Do you think that using acronyms would be helpful while chatting and why?
3. Don't you think that using acronyms might create misunderstanding among chatters? And why?
4. Why do you use a blend such as (instafood, instagood, twitpic, propic) while posting on social media?
5. Do you think that using blends would be helpful throughout communication on social media? And why?

8.4 Participants

The research sample in this current study consists of fifty 4th year students from the Department of English at Al-Ba'ath University. Fourth-year students are chosen because they are more qualified than their first, second- and third-year counterparts.

9. Analysis and Findings

The results are analyzed statistically in order to find out exactly how competent the participants are in blending and acronymy. Then a brief discussion is given after analyzing each test.

9.1 Fill-in-the-gap test: analysis and discussion

Ten items are used in this test (five in English and five in Arabic). The following are the items meant to test the participants' familiarity with English blends (for the reader's convenience, the correct blends are included in brackets):

1. Rami is so drunk today. He has spent _____ very well (alcoholiday).
2. A tool which is used to protect ourselves from sun is _____ (sunbrella).
3. He attends religious services only twice a year, at Christmas or Easter; he is a _____ (Chriseaster).
4. A _____ is a video game, card game, or other toy featuring certain Japanese cartoon character (Pokémon).
5. _____ is a program made available in digital format for automatic download over the internet. (Podcasting).

The items aimed at testing the participants' familiarity with Arabic blends are:

6. Could you tell us when the _____ competition starts? (rakmaja)
7. When reading the Holy Quran, one should start with _____ (basmalah).

8. The result of the combination of the two words (jaʕltu+fidaka) is _____ which refers to an intimate relationship between people. (jaʕfad)
9. The two words (sʕalada+sʕamada) give the combination _____ that refers to a brave person. (sʕaladama)
10. The derived noun from the two words jalada+jamada is _____ (julmu:d).

Moreover, the following Table illustrates how the participants performed in this test

Item	Correct answers	Percentage
1.	Alcoholiday, 35	70%
2.	Sunbrella, 15	30%
3	Chriseaster, 15	30%
4.	Pokémon, 40	80%
5.	Podcasting, 45	90%
Participants' familiarity with English blends:		82.67%
6.	rakmaja, 7	14%
7.	Basmalah, 35	70%
8.	jaʕfad, 4	8%
9.	sʕaladama, 8	16%
10	julmu:d, 12	24%
Participants' familiarity with Arabic blends:		26.4%

Table 3. Gap-filling test results of familiarity of the participants with English and Arabic blends

In phrase number (1), 70% of the students answered correctly to give the blend *alcoholiday*, which is derived from the two words: alcohol and holiday. Here, students were familiar with this blend, too. Indeed, in this blend, an overlapping occurs between the final part of the first word and the first part of the second word, which is (holy). In phrase number (2), only fifteen participants gave the correct answer, which is *sunbrella*, derived from the two words: *sun+umbrella*. 70% of the participants failed to answer correctly. Indeed, *sunbrella* is uncommon word and people are more familiar with *umbrella* rather than *sunbrella*. In phrase number (3), the correct answer is *chriseaster*, which is derived from the two words Christmas and Easter. Also, most students failed to give the correct answer because they were not familiar with it. Only 30% of them knew the right answer. In phrase number (4), the correct answer is Pokémon, which is frequently used by teenagers and children nowadays. It refers to a famous video game. 80% of the participants answered correctly. In phase number (5), the answer is podcasting. 90% of the participants knew the right answer. This is due to the increased use of social networking websites and applications. *Podcasting* is used frequently on

social media, which is why participants were familiar with this blend.

As for the participants' familiarity with Arabic blends, the results are unsatisfactory, but not surprising. The phrase participants were most familiar with was *basmalah*, which is expected since it is a rather common blend in Arabic. Overall, the results of this part of the test indicate that the participants, being students of English, have little knowledge of Arabic blending.

10. Reasons behind using blends and acronyms on social media: analysis and discussion

As mentioned in subsection 8.2, this test includes five questions about blends and acronyms. The aim of this test is to find out why the participants would use blends and acronyms on social media. The answers given by the participants are discussed below. Some of them were strange; others were quite logical:

1. Some students argued that using blends such as *brunch* and *motel* and acronyms such as *BTW*, *DYK* save time throughout chatting.
2. Others reported that they are "global" symbols which are used to refer to longer sentences or phrase.

3. They are easy to be written and are frequently used in conversations.
4. Using them makes chatting faster, practical and convenient.
5. They keep their chats secure and ambiguous to their parents, so they think that they are codes that cannot be understood.
6. Using blends and acronyms depends on the age of the users. So, it is a kind of fashion and people who are older than them would not be able to understand either blends or acronyms.
7. 10% of the participants did not know what blends and acronyms meant; this means that these particular participants did not use them on social media.
8. Some students did not use them in order to retain the original word forms in their mental lexicon.
9. They would not create misunderstanding because they are common nowadays.
10. Using blends and acronyms brings more engagement to social media. It also makes them feel more relevant to internet language and the digital age.

These answers show that most participants in this study prefer to use blends and acronyms on social media. Only some

students reported that blends and acronyms are not useful on social media. This is illustrated in figure 1 below:

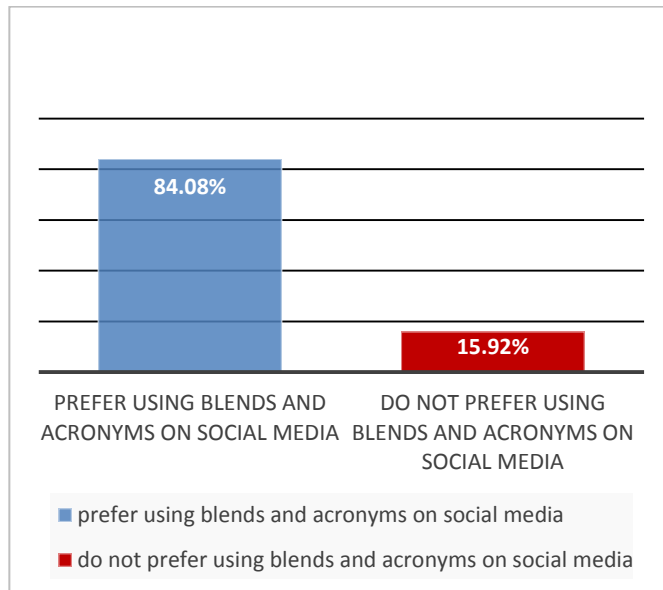


Figure 1. Bar chart showing participants' preference for using acronyms and blends

11. Findings

The results of the study show that most participants are more familiar with English blends than with the Arabic ones. This is

shown in table 3, where of students 82.67% were familiar with English blends, as opposed to 18.33% who were not familiar with them. Indeed, this good result is because participants are fourth-year students students at the English Department, so they are rather skilled enough in English and are interested in learning new words including blends. The remaining blends and acronyms, which participants failed to recognize, can be learnt by practice and exposure.

Moreover, of the participants were familiar with Arabic blends. The majority of the participants showed their unfamiliarity with Arabic morphology. This asserts that these participants are more familiar with English morphology.

Furthermore, as regards the short survey, the answers students gave about using blends and acronyms on social media differ from one participant to another. The results reveal that many students prefer using them to save time, whereas others do not use them at all. So, it could be said that blends and acronyms have a wider distribution in English than in Arabic; blends and acronyms in Arabic are still not so common.

According to Thomas et al, (1960), this inequivalent distribution is due to cultural, scientific and linguistic variables. Another factor may justify this phenomenon that English

names are more catchier and attractive. They attract peoples' attention and motivate more marketing activities.

12. Pedagogical Implications

Teachers of English in Syria should encourage students to learn more about blending and acronymy and to continue learning on their own after leaving the classroom. If developing the learner's autonomy becomes the main concern of all tutors, students will eventually have better competence, which should boost their confidence in themselves.

Also, it could be said that it would be worthwhile to introduce students of English at Al-Ba'ath University to contrastive linguistics in order to make them aware of the similarities and differences between their native language and the target language, as a way of increasing their communicative competence.

13. Recommendations for Further Research

More studies in this field ought to be conducted in order to help students of English at Al-Ba'ath University be more aquatinted with blends and acronyms. Further contrastive studies should investigate the extent to which acronymization and blending tend to be a universal linguistic phenomenon.

14. Conclusion

The results of this study show that the familiarity of blends and acronyms in English and Arabic is due to the rising tendency of speakers to use them, especially on social media. Nowadays, it seems that speakers tend to shorten words in order to save time. The participants in this study were more familiar with blends and acronyms in English. This is largely because their linguistic competence in Arabic is lacking. This may have to do with the fact that blends and acronyms mostly come from English.

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