

LOGOGENESIS

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LOGOGENESIS n. the creation of new words, neologistics.

New words are being invented every day. Maybe I've created a couple in the line above, or has someone beaten me to it?

Many neologisms are based on existing prefixes and suffixes. The term XERISCAPE is used in a modern gardening magazine to describe 'drought tolerant planting', and if something can be 'taillike', why not UNTAILLIKE, or for that matter UNKNEELIKE, UNOVUMLIKE or ARMPITLIKE? **The Dictionary of American Slang** (1960), by Wentworth and Flexner, records DAZZOLA-DIZZOLA words such as TRYOUTEE, DRINKATORIUM, COWPUNCHERERESE, HEEBYJEEBYISH, LIMERICKITIS and FLAPPEROCRACY.

In our politically correct world, terms like FOREPERSON and POSTPERSON abound. The **Oxford English Dictionary** (OED) cites HENCHPERSON, YARDPERSON and EVERYPERSON, while our local newspaper recently mentioned a 'GOLFPERSON of the year competition'. At first, reading this seemed odd, because a golfer can be male or female, and the word GOLFMAN doesn't seem to exist (it does now!). However, further investigation revealed the competition was open to golf administrators as well as golf players.

Some feminists are said to despise the word 'woman' to the point of substituting the awful WOPERSON. The male element in this word can be removed by the tongue-in-cheek WOPERCHILD, which believe it or not has actually been used, though only to demonstrate how ridiculous this approach to so-called sexist language can be. In a book of essays in honour of New Zealand lexicographer Harry Orsman, it is even jokingly mentioned that he has never seen fit to use the name ORSPERSON!

Then there are coined words like Lewis Carroll's OUTGRABE and James Joyce's BURNZBURN. Browse through any **Word Ways** and you will encounter intriguing non-dictionary terms like YENOHPA, FFULBAS, STERNELDER, MMMN, UNDERDRUNE and TRITERRIER (all in August 1994).

In 'X-ing A Paragrab' Edgar Allan Poe substitutes the letter X for O. Under 'wood' in the OED there is an 1849 citation 'Dxn't crxw ... befxre yxu're xut xf the wxxd's'. Using the same letter substitution, 'foolproof' would be rendered FXXLPRXXF and 'logology' LXGXLXGY. The possibilities are endless.

Another means of inventing new words is by expletive infixation: UNBLOODYLIKELY words as they have been called. These terms are often hyphenated, but need not be. Unattested examples occur in the likes of 'Not A-BALLY-GAIN', 'That's UNDAMNFAIR' and

'Wow! INSODDINGCREDIBLE'.

Inventing portmanteau words is an entertaining diversion. Fairly well-known specimens of this SUPERDUPERIFIC genre include INSINUENDO, GINORMOUS, HORRIDIBLE and Walter Winchell's INFANTICIPATING (pregnant). Here are some other compoundings that have appeared in print:

BEAUTILITY (beauty + utility)
 EXACCURATE (exact + accurate)
 TRACULENCE (track + turbulence)
 HEARTISTIC (heart + artistic)
 POSILUTELY (positively + absolutely)
 STRIVATION (strive + starvation)

I'm sure you could make up lots more useful blend words--and why not? The famous and not-so-famous have been doing it for a LONGENDOUS time.

From portmanteau words it is only a short step to the spoonerism, a linguistic form examined in depth by Richard Lederer in his excellent August 1994 **Word Ways** article 'Spag Me With A Goonerism' (whoops!). The redoubtable Reverend Doctor William Archibald Spooner (1844-1930) is credited with all manner of comic transpositions, most of which he never said at all. Nevertheless, spoonerism is a fine way of creating new words, as evidenced by the following examples.

Firstly, three famous ones attributed to our 'Eric from Cloxford':

MARDON me, PADAM, you are OCCUPEWING my pie
 It is KISSTOMARY to cuss the bride
 KINKERING Kongs Their Titles Take

The spelling KINQUERING is quoted by Gyles Brandreth in **The Word Book** (1988).

Of course, not all unintentional switches are quite so humorous, but human nature being what it is, people tend to remember the howlers. For the record, here are a couple of little-known, not-so-funny utterances also attributable to William Spooner, quoted in **Speverend Rooner** (1991), by Rose Simpson.

During his later years, Spooner developed a great passion for 17th-century literature, and was wont to quote aloud (often to himself) any particular passage that flashed into his head. Once, while contemplating a member of the fairer sex, he came out with some mixed-up verse from French poet Jean Racine (1639-1699):

She is all havoring and WESITATION, in short she is a woman
 (Havoring is a real word: hemming and hawing, talking nonsense.)

On another occasion, when being pressed for payment of an overdue account, Spooner got tangled with a line from the Spanish scholar James Mabbe (1572-1642), claiming the debt-collector was

alleging the ANTELARITY of time, and PRIOTION of his debt

(Antelation is an old term meaning preference or precedence.)

I have briefly dealt with some of the many ways in which new words can be formed. English is a flexible medium, and writers will always strive for originality. Some celebrated authors have their coinages recorded by standard dictionaries; for instance Joyce's palindromic TATTARRATTTAT (a rapping), and Carroll's tautonymic JUBJUB (an imaginary bird) appear in the OED, while Beatrix Potter's delightful TIGGYWINKLE (a hedgehog) is listed in the **Chambers Dictionary** (1993). I wonder which cunning linguist first used BASS-ACKWARDS, a spoonerized anagram of ASS-BACKWARDS found in **12000 Words** (1986), a supplement to Webster's Third Edition.

Who is to say these inventions have any more merit than those of a lesser scribe? When does a made-up term of this sort actually become a word? When it appears in print? Call them what you like--coined words, absurd words, fad words, gibberish, synthetic slang, barbarisms, abominations, nonce words, nonsense words they are a part of our language.

As Gyles Brandreth says, if you've got nothing much to do between now and midnight, why not follow in the footsteps of William Blake or Lewis Carroll or P.G. Wodehouse, and invent a word? Glucktoya!

A SCHOLARLY CRITIQUE OF THE OED

*The early history of the Oxford English Dictionary was entertainingly captured in **Caught in the Web of Words** (1977), the biography of its principal editor, James A. H. Murray. John Willinsky has brought the story up to date in **Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED** (Princeton University Press, 1994). Although he commends the editors for striving toward the well-nigh-impossible goal of being "an accurate and comprehensive register of the whole vocabulary of English", he finds numerous faults with the OED. He believes that citations often fail to illuminate the definitions. More fundamentally, he asserts that the dictionary was compiled from the point of view of the reasonably-well-educated British male, neglecting or distorting that of women or the working class. The first edition leaned too heavily on citations from the publishing trades and literary luminaries (especially Shakespeare); these biases have to some extent been corrected in the second edition, which cites more newspapers, periodicals, and non-British sources. The CD-ROM version of the dictionary has proved to be a most valuable tool for identifying these editorial predilections. Although the casual reader may be put off by the ponderous academic style of this text, he should persevere: it does offer an interesting overview of the lexicographic art.*