weak, pitiful, unfortunate," culminating in "simple, ignorant," and finally "foolish."

Words known popularly as Janus words (from *Janus,* the Roman god of doorways who faces two ways) have two contradictory meanings, one of which is favorable, the other not. Some examples are: *oversight,* meaning either "vigilant or responsible care" or "inadvertent or careless omission"; *sanction,* meaning either "approval, permission" or "punitive measure." Janus words bear watching to determine whether they will follow the pattern of other words in which a favorable meaning loses out over its opposite.

PART 5

generation:

many ways of growing words

INTRODUCTION

In *Gulliver's Travels*, Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) describes the language of the Houyhnhnms, a race of horses endowed with reason, as having no word to express something evil except by referring to the brutish Yahoos. "Thus," writes Swift, "they denote the folly of a servant, . . . a stone that cuts their feet, a continuance of foul or unseasonable weather, and the like, by adding to each the epithet of *Yahoo*." By contrast with the limited vocabulary of the Houyhnhnms, the vocabulary of English in Swift's time may have been too large for him. He had a strong dislike for new words, especially words he regarded as vulgar or slangy, such as *mob* and *phiz*. Yet even as Swift declared an end to good English after the Civil War of 1642, his contemporary, Benjamin Franklin, listed in his

Drinker's Dictionary (1733) no less than 228 terms for drunkenness (this number has grown since to 2,231, according to the word collector Paul Dickson).

The creation of new words is hardly new in English. It actually goes back to Anglo-Saxon times. Speakers of Old English routinely made up words to fill gaps in the language, usually by combining existing words into compounds like *palm-aeppel* (a date), *sweordbora* (swordbearer), and *godspel* (gospel, literally, "good talk"). The English of Geoffrey Chaucer (1343?–1400) abounded in compounds like *bake-mete* (pie), *marybones* (marrowbones), and *coverchief* (head covering). And Shakespeare, who coined such common words as *birthplace* and *eyeball*, was perhaps the most prolific of word inventors. According to Jeffrey McQuain and Stanley Malless, authors of *Coined by Shakespeare* (1998), the Bard probably added as many as 1,500 words to the English language, including many words we think of as modern or contemporary: *addiction, investment, premeditated, undervalue, well-behaved.*

While there is no limit to the number of new words that can be generated in a language, English is foremost, both in the size of its vocabulary (estimates have run from half a million to over a million words) and the rate at which it produces new words. In this era of globalization, English has come to be known both as an international language ("World English") and as a *default language*, that is, as the language most likely to be used in any system of communication if one does not or cannot opt for any other.

One way of measuring the expansion of the English vocabulary is by comparing the number of entries in standard dictionaries since 1755, when the first great modern dictionary, Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, burst upon the world. That work contained about 50,000 terms, considered a

monumental number in those days. By 1828, Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* included about 75,000 entries. Its 1864 successor, known as "the Unabridged edition," claimed 116,000. Less than thirty years later, the 1890 *Webster's International Dictionary* boasted the extraordinary number of 175,000. In 1934, *Webster's Second New International Dictionary* claimed 600,000! Finally, the 1961 *Webster's Third*, which eliminated many of the "encyclopedic" and obsolete entries in its predecessor, was still able to claim 450,000 terms within its covers.

The reason for this great expansion is not a secret. The progress achieved since the industrial revolution in technology, science, education, business, and in all other fields of knowledge has had no precedents in history, and with every advance came a concomitant growth of vocabulary. Consider just a handful of new words generated during the past fifty years: *aerospace, antimatter, brainwashing, computerize, cryonics, laptop, liposuction, telemarketing, waitron, wannabe.* These, like a great many of the words that find a permanent place in the language, are formed in distinct patterns.

There being no limits to creativity in the formation of words, new words continue to crop up regularly in countless unexpected forms. However, the processes of generation are finite and well-defined.

CHAPTER 19

baby talk:

hush, little baby, don't say a word

Out of the mouth of babes come . . . words.

The vocabulary of infants and young children is mostly of interest to their parents. Yet linguists have written volumes on this subject. They distinguish between *baby talk*, which they define as the utterances of young children, and *motherese* and *fatherese* (or *parentese*), which refer to the way parents (and, by extension, nannies, grandparents, and other caretakers) use baby talk when speaking to babies. A technical term for the speech patterns used by grown-ups addressing a baby is *child-directed speech.* A term used to cover a wide range of speech patterns, including those used in addressing patients or elderly dependents, is *caregiver speech.* Baby talk is not only used by parents, nannies, and other adults, but by pet owners talking to their pets (a practice that has been called *doggerel*), lovers exchanging endearments, and

anyone communicating on an infantile level. In his novel, *Seventeen* (1916), the American writer Booth Tarkington describes the way a pet owner speaks to Flopit, her dog: "Izzum's ickle heart a-beatin' so floppity! Um's own mumsy make ums all right, um's p'eshus Flopit!"

Some very common words originated in baby talk. Such words consist usually of one or two syllables that begin with a consonant. The words *babe* and *baby* evolved from an earlier word, *baban,* which was probably motherese for the repeated syllables *ba, ba* typically uttered by infants. The word *babble,* "to prattle like an infant," came apparently from the same source, and is found in other languages besides English, such as Low German *babbele,* Icelandic *babbla,* and Old French *babiller,* "to babble," and Latin *babulus,* "one who babbles." Similarly, the word *mama, mamma* for "mother" appears in many languages, as does the word *papa, pappa* for "father." The word *dad, daddy* is also represented, in somewhat different form, in Latin and Greek *tata,* Welsh *tad,* and Sanskrit *tata-s.*

Baby talk begins when an infant or toddler mispronounces the name of a person or thing and the parents repeat it when talking to the child. If, for example, the child calls the grandfather "Grampy" instead of "Grandpa," the parents and the rest of the family might begin to refer to the grandfather as "Grampy." This kind of usage is quick to spread. Indeed, a well-known *hypocorism* (technical term for a pet name or endearment, from *hypo-,* "under" + Greek *korizesthai,* "to caress") is "Granny" or "Gammy" for "Grandma." The diminutive ending *-y* (and its variant, *-ie)* is one of the commonest forms of baby talk in English, found in words like *doggie, ducky, birdie, kiddie, cutie, kitty,* and in names like *Betsy, Jackie, Ronnie, Margie, Danny,* and *Benny.*

Clipped words or names often result from baby talk. Such short forms as *chick, chimp, mom, pop, Meg, Peg* (nicknames for *Margaret*), and *Dot, Doll* (for *Dorothy*) originated in baby talk. Words imitating sounds may have started as baby talk. Typical words in this class are *baa* (of sheep), *bowwow* (of dogs), *cheep* or *tweet* (of birds), *meow* (of cats), *moo* (of cows), *oink* (of hogs), and *quack* (of ducks and geese).

BABY BABBLE

Baby talk is concerned with the limited activities of babies, much of which involve simple physical processes. The following is a list of words common in baby talk:

BEDDY-BYE: The time for a baby or very young child to go to bed.

BINKIE: A pacifier. From *Binky,* a brand of pacifier.

BLANKIE: A baby's blanket.

BOO-BOO: A minor injury. A reduplication of *boo,* as in *boo-hoo,* "noisy weeping."

BUDDY: Chum, pal, brother. Baby talk for *brother.*

BUNNY: A rabbit. From *bun,* a word for a rabbit's tail.

BYE-BYE: Good-bye.

CHOO-CHOO: A railroad train. Alteration and reduplication of *tr-* of *train* in imitation of the sound of a train in motion.

DA-DA: Father.

DIN-DIN: Dinner.

DO, DOO, DOO-DOO, or **DOODY:** 1. Feces. 2. defecation. Perhaps alteration of *dirty.*

ICKY: Sticky; disgusting.

JAMMIES: Pajamas.

MAMA: Mother.

NANA: Grandma.

OOPSY-DAISY!: Said on tossing a baby up and down. Probably from *upside-down.*

OWIE: A minor injury; a boo-boo. From *ow*, a cry of pain.

PEE or **PEE-PEE:** 1. Urine. 2. To urinate. (baby talk for *piss*) 3. A penis.

PIGGIE: A baby's finger or toe. From the game "This little piggy went to market."

POOP or **POO-POO:** Feces; defecation. Probably from a reduplication of *pooh*, an exclamation of dislike or disgust.

POTTY: Toilet-training pot or chair.

TEDDY: A stuffed toy bear. Named in cartoons after President *Teddy* Roosevelt, famous for hunting bears.

TEENY-WEENY, TEENIE-WEENIE, TEENSY-WEENSY, or **TEENTSY-WEENTSY:** Very small; tiny. Alteration and reduplication of *teeny*, itself a blend of *tiny* and *wee*.

TINKLE: A urinating.

TUMMY: Stomach. Alteration of *stomach* + diminutive ending *-y*.

TUSH, TUSHIE: Buttocks. Alteration of Yiddish *tukhes*.

WAWA: Water.

WEE-WEE: A urinating.

YUCKY: Same as ***icky***.

YUM, YUMMY, or **YUM-YUM:** Pleasing to the taste; delicious.

Baby talk is a universal feature of language, with a distinctive vocabulary in most languages. For example, in French, a boo-boo is *bobo*, yum-yum is *miam-miam*, pee-pee is *pipi*, and milkie is *le lolo*. The baby talk of more than thirty languages has been recorded. See also the chapters on **Nonsense Words** and **Onomatopoeia.**

CHAPTER 20

blends or portmanteau words:

the frabjous utility of beautility

In 1976, the linguist Margaret M. Bryant wrote an article in the journal *American Speech* entitled "Blends Are Increasing." In it she pointed out that before the 19th century *blends*, or two words combined to form a new word, were rather uncommon and did not become a widespread formation until the 20th century. There is little doubt that the impulse to telescope words together comes from the modern need to speed things up, to save time, to do things quickly. Blending is a form of abbreviation or contraction, as evinced by the fondness headline-writers have for them. An extreme example of "headline-ese" is TEX-MEX'S POP SPANGLISH JARGOT (translation: the Texan-Mexican dialect is a popular Spanish-English jargon or argot). Perhaps the most notorious blender in the last century was *Time* magazine, which created *Timese* or *Timespeak*, a style of writing marked by the

use of such blends as *cinemactress, guesstimate, slanguage, cinemogul,* all blends that include letters or sounds that the two words have in common (cinem*a* + *a*ctress, gu*ess* + *estimate*, sl*ang* + *language*, cinem(a) + *mogul*).

PORTMANTEAU WORDS

Blends are also called *blend words, amalgams, fusions, hybrids,* and, notably, *portmanteau words.* A portmanteau is a trunk or suitcase that opens into two hinged halves. It's a British word borrowed from a French blend of *porter,* "to carry," and *manteau,* "a cloak." The term *portmanteau word* was popularized by Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872), in which Humpty Dumpty explains the word *slithy* in the nonsense poem "Jabberwocky":

> ". . . slithy means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed into one word." Further on he says: " 'Mimsy' is 'flimsy and miserable' (there's another portmanteau for you)."

Carroll's portmanteaus were not the usual blends of two words with a common sound in the middle, but clever fusions of two words, several of which have become part of the language. Among them are *chortle* (blend of *chuckle* and *snort*), *galumph* (blend of *gallop* and *triumph*), *frabjous* (irregular blend of *fabulous* and *joyous*), and *frumious* (blend of *fuming* and *furious*). These coinages are meant to suggest the action they describe: to *galumph* is to gallop triumphantly; a *frabjous* day is fabulous and joyous.

English portmanteau words were not invented by Carroll. Various short, expressive words, often imitative of sounds, are found earlier in the language and appear to be blends. Among

them is the verb *slosh,* "to splash through mud or slush," used since the early 1800s, and apparently a blend of the earlier words *slop* and *slush.* Similarly, the verb *smash,* "to break into pieces," known since the early 1700s, seems to be a blend of the earlier *smack* and *mash.* And *splatter,* "to splash and scatter," attested since the 1770s, is probably a blend of *splash* and *spatter.* Another expressive word, *squiggle,* known since the early 1800s, originated as a blend of *squirm* and *wriggle.*

A famous early American example of a blend is *gerrymander,* coined in 1812, and referring to the act or practice of dividing a county or state along political lines to allow the party in power to retain a majority. The term was derived from the name of Massachusetts governor Elbridge *Gerry,* who signed a bill in 1811 that redrew the representative districts so as to favor his own Democratic party. History or legend has it that a drawing of the redistricted map of Essex County, Massachusetts, caused the painter Gilbert Stuart to tell the editor of a Boston paper that it resembled a salamander. "A salamander?" the editor said. "Call it a Gerrymander!" The term, a blend of *Gerry* and (sala)*mander,* quickly caught on; caricatures of the salamander-like map were widely publicized, and the verb *to gerrymander* became part of American English. In *Safire's New Political Dictionary,* William Safire writes:

> Governor Gerry, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and later one of James Madison's Vice Presidents, has become—thanks to linguistics—one of the villains of American history. Actually, he never sponsored the redistricting bill and is said to have signed it reluctantly.

SCUZZY ORIGINS

Blends are sometimes so successful as single words that their origin remains obscure or uncertain. The slang word *scuzzy*, meaning "dirty or grimy," is such a word. It may be a blend of *scummy* and *fuzzy*, but perhaps it's an alteration of *disgusting*; its actual origin remains uncertain. H. L. Mencken, in *The American Language*, takes a stab at several such words. He writes: "*Boost* (*boom* + *hoist*) is a typical American blend. I have a notion that *blurb* is a blend also. So, perhaps, is *flunk*; Dr. Louise Pound says that it may be from *fail* and *funk*." Current dictionaries disagree. The origin of *boost* is deemed unknown; *blurb*, coined by Gelett Burgess (see chapter on **Coinages**), was not acknowledged by the coiner as a blend; and *flunk*, according to *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, is perhaps a blend of *flinch* and *funk*. Mencken also guesses that *blurt*, "to utter abruptly," is a blend of *blare* and *spurt*, and that *dumbfound* is a blend of *dumb* and *confound*, but only the latter has been confirmed by lexicographers.

Mencken was not alone among language mavens to conjure up unverified blends. Bergen and Cornelia Evans, in their *Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* (1957), assert that *dandle*, "to move (a baby, etc.) up and down," is a blend of *dance* and *handle*. This is pure conjecture, since *dandle* has been in English since the 1500s, long before blends of this kind were ever formed.

What motivates people to create blends? A prime impulse seems to be a wish to shorten a phrase that seems too long or clumsy. Thus, an *exercise bicycle* is transformed into an *exercycle*, *aviation electronics* is turned into *avionics*, a *croissant sandwich* becomes a *croissandwich*, and a *simultaneous broadcast* is more felicitously rendered as a *simulcast*. This process of collapsing two or more words into one is especially popular in commerce and industry, as in *Breathalyzer* (for *breath analyzer*), *Instamatic* (blend of *Instant* and *automatic*), *Sunoco* (for *Sun Oil Company*), *Lescol* (for *less cholesterol*), and in place names, such as *Chunnel* (for *Channel Tunnel*), *Oxbridge* (for *Oxford* and *Cambridge*), *Pakistan* (from the initials of Punjab, Afghania, Kashmir + the ending *-istan*, as in Baluch*istan*), *Eurasia* (blend of *Europe* and *Asia*), and *Malaysia* (blend of *Malay* and *Asia*).

A blend is perhaps most appropriate when it names something that is itself a blend or hybrid. Some examples of such words are: *tiglon* or *tigon* (blend of *tiger* and *lion*), the hybrid offspring of a male tiger and female lion, and *liger* (blend of *lion* and *tiger*), the hybrid offspring of a male lion and female tiger; *zedonk* (male *zebra* and female *donkey*) and *zonkey* (female *zebra* and male *donkey*); *yakow* (blend of *yak* and *cow*) and *beefalo* (blend of *beef* cattle and *buffalo*).

Language hybrids make for similarly perfect blends. Among them are *Frenglish* (blend of *French* and *English*), which is English containing many French words, by contrast with *franglais* (blend of *français* and *anglais*), which is French containing many English words. The term *franglais* was popularized by René Etiemble, a professor of comparative languages at the Sorbonne. In a book, *Parlez-vous franglais?*, published in 1964, he criticized the inordinate influence of English words, especially Americanisms, on the French language, urging the excision of such anglicisms as *le planning et research*, *le weekend*, and *le country*. To stop what he considered a misuse of the French language, he proposed French equivalents to anglicisms, such as *roquette* for *rocket* and *métingue* for *meeting*.

Other well-known language mixtures include *Hindlish* or *Hinglish* (blend of *Hindi* and *English*); *Japlish* or *Janglish* (blend of *Japanese* and *English*); *Spanglish* (blend of *Spanish* and *English*); *Yinglish* (blend of *Yiddish* and *English*); *Chinglish* (blend of *Chinese* and *English*). All of these, as well as *Singlish* (Singapore English), *Italglish*,

Russlish, and *Taglish* (Tagalog English), are informal names, often regarded as inferior forms of the base languages.

The most useful blends are those that supply names for new things or ideas. *Smog* was coined to designate the mixture of *smoke* and *fog,* and *smaze,* the mixture of *smoke* and *haze,* that pollute the atmosphere. A *brunch* is the perfect name for a meal between *breakfast* and *lunch.* A *pulsar,* or pulsating star, is a blend of *puls*(ating) (st)*ar,* and a *pixel,* the smallest element in a picture, is a blend of *pix* (= pics) and *el*(ement). *Medicare* and *Medicaid* are blends, respectively, of *Medic*(al) + *care,* and *Medica*(al) + *aid.* In the 1970s, when the blend *beautility,* for a combination of beauty and utility, made its debut, both the American William Safire and the British Bernard Levin chose this word to illustrate the perfect blend.

> Safire: "The best new word that fills a gap in the language was minted by architectural writer Ada Louise Huxtable to describe a happy marriage of form and function: 'beautility.'"
>
> Levin: "A survey of what Lewis Carroll called portmanteaus—words created by a kind of linguistic dialectic from two other words, [includes] the now accepted *beautility.*"

Many blends have no utility and are formed playfully or for the nonce. Time magazine's *yumptious* (blend of *yummy* and *scrumptious*) died aborning. Other miscarriages of recent decades were: *faction* (blend of *fact* and *fiction*), not bad per se but clashing with the standard word *faction,* and *oilonnaire* (blend of *oil* and *millionaire*).

As for the question, are blends increasing? it appears that they are, but mostly in commercial names. In *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1992), its editor, Tom McArthur,

writes: "... blending is increasing because of the need for compact scientific and technical names such as *amatol* from *ammonium nitrate* and *trinitrotoluene,* and for ... quasi-blends such as *Mentadent,* a toothpaste flavoured with menthol ... *Atomergic Chemetals* is the portmanteau name for a company with varied interests."

CHAPTER 21

coinages:

the art of minting new words

"Young schollers not halfe well studied... seeme to coign fine words out of Latin," wrote Richard Puttenham in 1589 in *The Arte of English Poesie*. The comparison of new words to coins newly minted seems to have been well-established in Puttenham's Elizabethan English. To coin new words means to make them up, the way the government manufactures shining new coins by stamping metal. We also speak of *minting* words and even *borrowing* them (see Part 6, **Borrowing**), as if they were coins of the realm. If words were worth their weight in money, we'd all be rich. Still, it has become customary to speak of new or invented words as *coinages*.

Coinages that name new concepts are rarely completely new creations. Even the classic example of *googol* cannot be said to be a totally new invention. *Googol*, a word meaning the number 1 followed by 100 zeros (10 to the 100th power), was coined in 1940 by Milton Sirotta, a boy of nine who was the nephew of the U.S. mathematician Edward Kasner. In the book *Mathematics and the Imagination*, written with James Newman, Kasner relates that, when he asked his young nephew to name a very large number, larger than the number of elementary particles in the entire universe (estimated to be 10 to the 80th power), Milton thought a moment, then exclaimed, "a googol!" A new word, no doubt, but being a child's invention, it may have been easily influenced by the name of the then very popular comic-strip character Barney *Google*.

Despite its whimsical derivation, *googol* became important in advanced mathematics, spawning other new technical terms, such as *googolplex* (1 followed by a googol of zeros), *googolpolygon* (a polygon with a googol sides), and *googolhedron* (a polyhedron with a googol faces). And it should tickle the fancy of Internet users to learn that the most popular search engine in the world, *Google*, was named by its inventors, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, as a play on the word *googol*. Their use of this term was meant to reflect Google's objective: to organize the immense amount of information on the World Wide Web to googol-like numbers. Not in his wildest fantasies could little Milton Sirotta have imagined that his spontaneous coinage would one day be carried into the outer reaches of cyberspace.

MINTING NEW WORDS

Another classic coinage is the word *gas*, attributed to the 17th-century Flemish chemist Van Helmont, who invented it to denote a chemical principle present in all bodies. A century later, the word was adopted to describe any fluid substance, like air, that tends to expand indefinitely, and soon afterward it was ap-

plied to a flammable gas mixture. How did Van Helmont stumble on this mysterious word? It is generally believed that in coining *gas* he was influenced by the similar-sounding Greek word *cháos,* "a chasm or empty space," which the Swiss physician and alchemist Paracelsus had earlier (1500s) used to refer to a certain element in spirits. Though it would have been fitting, punwise or otherwise, had Van Helmont coined *gas* out of thin air, it appears that he did not.

A modern example of an obscure coinage that has been traced to an equally obscure source is the word *quark.* A quark is a fundamental nuclear particle from which protons and other subatomic particles are composed. *Quark* was coined in 1961 by an American particle physicist, Murray Gell-Mann, who took the word from the line "Three quarks from Muster Mark!" in James Joyce's masterpiece *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The line reflected Gell-Mann's theory that there are three types of quarks (named *down quark, up quark,* and *strange quark*) that combine in various ways to make up all subatomic particles. As to where Joyce got the word, it has been suggested that he borrowed it from the German slang term *Quark,* meaning a trifling thing, trash, rubbish.

Unlike *googol, gas,* and *quark,* most coinages are made up of the stock of existing words. In his 1949 novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* George Orwell coined the word *Newspeak* (for a language designed to distort the truth) by combining the adjective *new* with the verb *speak.* Orwell's coinage became the model for other new words ending in *-speak,* such as *adspeak* (the language of ads), *businesspeak* (the jargon of business), and *kiddiespeak* (children's language). But let's not assume that words can never be minted out of thin air. English words are made up of syllables, and it has been estimated that the number of syllables that can be used in English to form new words runs into the hundreds of thou-

sands. Consider *-bir-, -gub-, -zas-,* or *-ig, -ud, -loob,* and *-moob.* All such syllables can be used singly or in combination to form unique new words.

A master of such coinages was Frank Gelett Burgess (1866–1951), an American illustrator, poet, and humorist whose early books of humor (*Goops & How to Be Them, Are You a Bromide?, Maxims of Methuselah in Regard to Women, Burgess Unabridged: A New Dictionary of Words You Have Always Needed*) are still in print. As a coiner, he is best known for having invented the word *blurb* to describe the exaggerated and effusive recommendations found on the dust jackets of books.

COINAGES **OUT OF** CIRCULATION

A glance at *Burgess Unabridged* reveals many other strange, mysterious, funny, and deserving coinages that have unfortunately never caught on. Here are a few:

OOFLE, *noun.* A person whose name you cannot remember: *There goes, uh, you know, Mrs. Oofle! -verb.* To try to find out a person's name without asking.

PAWDLE, *noun.* A person of mediocre ability, raised to undeserved prominence: *The company's new CEO is a nice guy but a pawdle.*

VOIP, *noun.* Food that gives no gastronomic pleasure; any provender that is filling, but tasteless. *-verb.* To eat hurriedly, without tasting: *Stop voiping your food!*

These and similar "Burgessisms" are akin to the category of *Sniglets,* words that should be part of the standard dictionary but aren't. They are not nonsense words, since they actually "mean" something (see the chapter on **Non-**

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sense Words). Nor are they nonce words, since they are intended, however unrealistically, to be used in speech and writing (see the chapter on **Nonce Words**).

COINAGES IN CIRCULATION

Successful coinages by individuals are relatively rare, though certain words known to have been coined by particular people have succeeded in making their way into dictionaries. Here are a few:

DONTOPEDALOGY: A propensity for putting one's foot in one's mouth; a tendency to say something inappropriate or indiscreet. Coined by Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, from *donto-* (from Greek *odóntos*, "tooth") + *pedal* (from Latin *ped-*, "foot") + *-logy* ("science, study"). Prince Philip applied the word humorously to himself. Its popularity, such as it is, is due more to its having been coined by a celebrated royal than to its aptness as an encapsulation of the expression "to put one's foot in one's mouth."

ECDYSIAST: A stripteaser. Coined by the writer and social critic H. L. Mencken (1880–1956) from *ecdysis*, the technical term for the shedding of the outer skin by a reptile or insect + the ending *-ast* in *enthusiast*. Mencken, author of *The American Language* (1921), coined the word with tongue in cheek as a euphemism for moralists who found the word "stripteaser" too racy.

FACTOID: An unsubstantiated statement, account, or report published as if it were factual. Coined by the novelist Norman Mailer from *fact* + *-oid* (as in *android*, *humanoid*), in reference to his fictionalized biography of Marilyn Monroe, *Marilyn: A Biography* (1973), in which he treated his subject novelistically.

PSYCHEDELIC: Any of a class of drugs that alter one's perception of reality. Coined in the late 1950s by Humphry Osmond, a British psychiatrist who researched the effects of mescaline and LSD, from a Greek word for "mind-revealing" or "mind-manifesting." The term is still used by believers in the curative powers of mind-altering chemicals, such as LSD, psilocybin, DMT, and others. Nonbelievers refer to psychedelic drugs as hallucinogens.

SERENDIPITY: An aptitude for making unexpected discoveries by accident. Coined by the English author Horace Walpole (1717–97) from *Serendip*, a former name of Sri Lanka (Ceylon) + the suffix *-ity*. In a letter dated January 28, 1754, Walpole explains that he coined the word after the title of "a silly fairy-tale, called *The Three Princes of Serendip*; as their highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of." The *Oxford English Dictionary* points out that the word was formerly rare, but it gained wide currency in the 20th century.

WORKAHOLIC: A person addicted to work, obsessed with one's job, or having a compulsive need to work constantly. Coined in the late 1960s by Wayne Oates, an American pastoral counselor, from *work* + *a(lco)holic*. The word spawned the combining forms *-aholic* and *-oholic*. (See the chapter on **Combining Forms**.)

Another author by the name of Burgess (no relation to Gelett), the British novelist Anthony Burgess (1917–93), was

also a noted coiner of words, but of a different kind. His futuristic novel, *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), is written almost entirely in a mixture of English and coined words based chiefly on Russian. Many of the words come directly from Russian, such as *devotchka*, "girl," *govorett*, "to talk to," *malchick*, "boy," *moloko*, "milk," and *platch*, "to cry." Some are anglicizations of Russian words, such as *horrorshow*, "good" (Russian *khorosho*) and *rabbit*, "work" (Russian *rabot*). Others are coinages based on various patterns of English word formation. For example, *chumble*, "to mumble" (blend of *chat* and *mumble*), *sarky* (short for *sarcastic*), *sinny* (shortening and alteration of *cinema*), and *charles* (alteration of *chaplain*). A considerable number of words are whimsical inventions worthy of Gelett Burgess. They include:

appy polly loggy: An apology

drencrom, synthemesc, vellocet: Names of various drugs

gulliwuts: Guts

pee and em: Pa and Ma

skolliwoll: School

TECHNO-TERMS

Most coinages are anonymous creations that insinuate themselves into the language gradually, almost always by one of the processes of word formation discussed in this book, such as compounding, derivation, and back-formation. But whatever form these coinages take, the common denominator among them is that they describe something new that cries out to be named. The *Internet* was such a coinage. The name, formed from *inter*(national) + (Arpa)*net*, first popped up in 1974 as a descendant of Arpanet, a U.S. government information network (the Advanced Research Projects Agency network) that was created in 1968 to keep up with Soviet advances in aerospace and nuclear science. In 1992, when the World Wide Web was launched, the Internet became a global commercial network connecting millions of computers. Soon it became known informally as "the Net," with the World Wide Web being dubbed "the Web."

The Internet quickly produced new coinages, the two most prominent being the adjective *dot-com* and the noun and verb *blog*. As computer-related companies proliferated in the 1990s, they started to be called "dot-com firms" or "dot-com companies," after the ".com" in their names. Every such name also contains the "at" symbol @. What is this symbol called? The American National Standards Institute has called it "commercial at." Others call it the "at sign" or "at symbol." Informally, it has been nicknamed a *snail*, *twist*, *curl*, *whorl*, *gizmo*, and *shmitshik*. At this writing, a new, seemingly authoritative name for the ubiquitous @ is *atmark*.

An endlessly fascinating new coinage in the world of cyberspace is *blog*, formed by contraction of *Web log*. A *blog* is essentially an online personal diary or journal available to the public on a Web site. There are countless blogs on the Web, and new ones appear every day. Its vocabulary is likewise expanding: *to blog* means "to post blogs"; *blogging* or *blogrolling* is "the act of posting or updating one's blog"; the author of a blog is a *blogger*; *blogophiles* are "blog-lovers"; the *blogosphere* is the realm of bloggers and blogging; and a *nom de blog* is "the pseudonym of a blogger." Standard dictionaries are having great difficulty keeping up with the Brobdingnagian explosion of blogisms. *Time* magazine has even instituted a *Blogwatch* column, featuring reports such as the following:

. . . there are an estimated 100,000 active Iranian blogs, so that Persian now ties with French as the second most used language in the blogosphere.

Blog has engendered offspring like *vlogs*, "blogs that includes video clips," run by *vloggers; phlogs* "blogs that include photos," run by *phloggers*; and *splogs* "spam blogs," which are nonsense texts linked to sites that *sploggers* are trying to promote.

TRADEMARKS

The best-known coinages by far are trademarks, the names of thousands of products and services repeated endlessly in television and radio commercials. Ironically, the most popular ones tend to become generic and, to the chagrin of their owners, in danger of losing their status as legally protected brand names. Few of us would guess that such common words as *aspirin, band-aid, cellophane, cornflakes, escalator, granola, kerosene, linoleum, nylon,* and *zipper* were formerly trademarks. Companies spend millions to create memorable trade names, and more millions trying to defend them from infringement by competitors. Their coinages have to be original and distinctive, fall trippingly from the tongue, and be easy to remember. Think of *Kleenex, Xerox, Frisbee, Mr. Clean,* and *Coke.* To pick on the least obvious coinage in this group, the saucer-shaped plastic disk called *Frisbee* was invented in 1957 by an American, Fred Morrison, and its name was registered as a trademark in 1959. The plastic disk was named as an alteration of "Frisbie," after the lightweight tins in which Mrs. *Frisbie's* pies were baked at the Frisbie bakery in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Three of the dangers facing trademarks are: (1) their being spelled in lower-case, like common words, (2) changing their

part of speech, usually noun to verb, and (3) losing their literalness and becoming figurative or metaphorical. When people begin to say "He xeroxed me a copy," or "I fedexed him the package," the capitalized trademarks *Xerox* and *FedEx* are on their way to becoming generic. When people speak of their mayor or governor as "Mr. Clean," they are no longer referring to a liquid cleanser but to a politician of spotless reputation. When Internet users talk about "googling for information" on a search engine, the verb use is a tribute to *Google's* popularity but also a warning that the name's days as a trademark may be numbered.

POLITICAL COINAGES

A prime motive for coining words is social and political change. Opponents of legalized abortion needed a positive term to designate their movement, as they deplored the negative sound of *antiabortion* and *antiabortionist.* To turn things around, they chose to promote themselves as "right-to-life" and "pro-life," implying thereby that those who favored abortions were against life. Not to be outdone, the "proabortion" movement or "proabortionists," deciding that the emphasis on abortion in their names had negative overtones, went on to coin the names "pro-choice" and "pro-choicer" for themselves, implying that they are not against "life" but rather in favor of everyone's right to choose to have an abortion if necessary.

Animal-rights groups had a similar problem: how to describe concisely and effectively the mistreatment and exploitation by human beings of various animal species. The term "antivivisection," referring to the movement opposing medical experimentation with animals, was old-fashioned, negative, and too restricted in meaning. A new coinage was called for. An Ameri-

can psychologist, Richard D. Ryder, heeded the call and came up with the term *speciesism*, modeled on such terms as *racism*, *sexism*, and *ageism*. Defined as the act or practice of discriminating against certain species of animals, such as rabbits, hamsters, and even dogs and cats, *speciesism* is condemned as inflicting needless pain and depriving animal species of the same rights that human beings have. Opponents of speciesism tend to be of various stripes, some animal liberationists who disapprove of holding animals captive in zoos, some who would object strenuously if the residents of zoos were transported back to the wilds of the Amazon or the Kalahari desert.

The above and many other social and political coinages are euphemisms, created deliberately to avoid sounding too blunt, negative, or offensive. (See the chapter on **Euphemism.**)

CHAPTER 22

combining forms:

a dictionary invention

One of the goals of the women's-rights movement of the 1970s was to purge the language of sexism. A part of the program was the elimination of the sex-specific word *man* in occupational titles which was seen as negating the role of women in the workplace. To avoid reference to gender, new terms were created: *mail carrier, camera operator,* and *chair* or *chairperson,* replacing *mailman, cameraman,* and *chairman.* These and many similar new terms were codified in the 1977 *Government's Dictionary of Occupational Titles.* Alongside such changes in the vocabulary as the use of *flight attendant* in place of *stewardess* and *steward,* and the adoption of *Ms.* as an optional form of address by the Government Printing Office, was the conversion of the word *person* into a combining form, spelled as *-person.*

Though a few compounds ending in *-person* had been in En-

glish formerly, for example, *salesperson* (1920s) and *tradesperson* (1880s), the use of the combining form became quickly a vogue in many walks of life: For example:

Politics: *chairperson, congressperson, councilperson, select-person, statesperson*

Sports: *fisherperson, marksperson, first-baseperson, track-person, yachtsperson*

Law: *foreperson, juryperson*

Workplace: *repairperson, policeperson, workperson*

Media: *anchorperson, sideperson, weatherperson*

Religion: *churchperson, layperson*

Business: *businessperson, committeeperson, spokesperson*

Home: *houseperson*

The proliferation of *-person* was of particular interest in that it ran counter to the long-held assumption that combining forms, by definition, could be used only in combinations and not stand alone as independent words. This was clearly not the case with *-person.*

A PRACTICAL DEVICE

What, then, is a combining form and where did the term come from?

Back in the late 19th century, the editor of the monumental *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), Sir James Murray, proposed that a word that occurs only in combination with other words should be called a *combining form,* to distinguish it from traditional suffixes and prefixes, which are grammatical forms of words. (See the chapter on **Prefixes and Suffixes.**) Murray chose not to use the label *affix* since this was an umbrella term for prefixes and suffixes, and he felt that a combining form and a prefix/suffix were different things, even though there is some connection between them. Following the *OED*'s lead, every modern English dictionary has since adopted the *OED* style, featuring many entries labeled *combining form* or *comb. form.* Yet you are not likely to find the term or label *combining form* in most English-language textbooks or books on style and grammar, which tend to lump combining forms under affixes.

A *combining form* is a dictionary invention (and some would say convention). It is a practical invention, since dictionaries save a lot of space by covering many words formed with a combining form under a single combining-form entry. For example, the combining form *-graphy* not only covers old words taken from Greek like *biography* and *geography,* but any word formed in English with *-graphy,* like, say, *photography, radiography,* and *mammography.*

Originally, Murray and his subeditors applied the term to the first element in classical or learned compounds, such as *acantho-,* described in the *OED* as "the combining form of Greek *ákantha,* 'thorn.' " Later the *OED* applied the term *combining form* to all forms that combine with a word or part of a word to make a new one. Thus, *acoustico-* was described as a combining form of the English word *acoustic,* and *acuto-,* as a combining form of English *acute.* The *OED* also applied the label to classical endings like *-onym,* meaning "word" or "name" (derived from Greek *ónyma, ónoma,* "name"), in words like *acronym, antonym,* and *toponym.* Though these words seem to have come entirely from Greek or Latin, they were actually formed in English using the combining form *-onym:*

acronym, "a word formed from the initial letters of a name or phrase, such as *radar* (radio detection and ranging)," coined in the 1940s from the combining forms *acr(o)-*, "tip, point" + *-onym*.

antonym, "a word that is the opposite of another," coined in the 1860s from the combining forms *ant(i)-*, "opposed to" + *-onym*, on the model of the classically-derived *synonym*.

toponym, "a place name," coined in the 1890s from the combining forms *top(o)-* (from Greek *tópos*, "place") + *-onym*.

James Murray's assumption that combining forms could only occur in combinations, never as actual words, was generally justified during the 19th century. Initial combining forms like *aero-* (*aerogram*), *astro-* (*astrology*), *electro-* (*electromagnet*), *geo-* (*geology*), or terminal ones like *-graphy* (*choreography*), *-logy* (*psychology*), *-onym* (*pseudonym*), *-philia* (*acidophilia*) did not exist as free-standing words. This state of affairs changed in the 20th century, when many common words were turned into combining forms, so that it was no longer possible to say that combining forms only existed in combinations. The reason for the proliferation of combining forms is clear: combining forms are space-saving and time-saving substitutes for lengthy explanations. Besides, they are productive forms, useful in creating new words.

THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND COMBINATIONS

The impetus behind the creation of a combining form is varied. The combining form *-cast*, derived from *broadcast* and forming such terms as *telecast*, *simulcast*, and *podcast* ("a recording posted on a Web site and downloaded to an iPod or other player"), was a

by-product of the growth of telecommunications. A combining form like *-proof*, meaning "resistant or impervious to (someone or something)," resulted from practical advances in commerce and industry. As a noun, *proof* has many meanings, such as *proof* of a crime, *proof* of an arithmetical operation, a photographic *proof*, the page *proofs* of a book. As an adjective it means "resistant," as in *proof against leaks*. It is this adjective that was turned into a combining form in words like *foolproof*, *rainproof*, *childproof*, *waterproof*, and *leakproof* when products were invented that were invulnerable to damage, even when tampered with.

Another motive for extracting a combining form from a word is to duplicate or reproduce the idea contained in the word. This is how the combining form *-speak* came about. The template for *-speak* was the word *Newspeak*, coined by the novelist George Orwell (1903–50) in his 1949 classic, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Newspeak was an artificial language designed to express only politically correct thoughts. It replaced *Oldspeak*, which had words for subversive ideas.

In the same book, Orwell coined words like *crimethink* (subversive political thinking), *oldthink* (politically incorrect thinking), and *doublethink* (contradictory thinking, such as "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery"). While *-think* never took off as a word-forming element, *-speak* did. Many words ending in *-speak* have sprouted since the 1960s, most meaning "a group's or profession's jargon or lingo," for example, *adspeak* (advertising jargon), *artspeak*, *businesspeak*, *computerspeak*, *femspeak* (feminist jargon), *gayspeak*, *technospeak* (technological jargon), *videospeak* (television jargon). Other words in *-speak* refer to one's style of speaking or writing, for example, *doublespeak* (ambiguous or misleading speech or writing), *bureaucratspeak*, *litcritspeak* (literary criticism writing). Most uses are for the nonce (see the chapter on **Nonce Words**), such as *discospeak*, *Freudspeak*, *Olympspeak*, *Pentagonspeak*.

There is a somewhat disparaging tinge attached to all of these words, reflecting the association of *-speak* with the original *Newspeak*, an artificial language with a limited and self-serving vocabulary.

Sometimes the reverse occurs, and a free-standing word is extracted from a combining form. The combining form *mini-*, clipped from *miniature*, had been used sporadically in Great Britain since the 1930s. But its use exploded in the 1960s, spurred by the popularity of smaller-than-average motor vehicles called *minicars, minicabs,* and *minibuses.* Suddenly *mini-* got attached to anything small, short, or minor, for example,

Small: *minicalculator, minicomputer, minifestival, mininuke, minipark, minitank*

Short: *minicourse, minilecture, minidress, miniseries, miniskirt, miniwear*

Minor: *miniboom, minibudget, miniplanet, minirevolution, ministate*

In due course, words like *minidress* and *miniskirt* were shortened to *mini* ("girls wearing minis"), as were *minicars, minicameras,* and anything small or miniature. The word served also as an adjective: *a mini musical, a mini stove.*

Mini- was inevitably followed by something even smaller, and that was the combining form *micro-*, meaning "very small." Attached to countless words, many of which have become part of the standard vocabulary, *micro-* gave us *microchip, microcircuit, microprobe, microprocessor, microwave,* and many others. It has been also used as a noun and adjective. As nouns and adjectives, both *mini* and *micro* were vogue words, bound to go out of fashion eventually (although as the name for small cars, *mini* is still popular).

But the combining forms *mini-* and *micro-*, though no longer as productive as they were in the latter part of the 20th century, have remained entrenched in English technical vocabulary. They are used especially in product names and trademarks, as *Minimouse* (for a computer mouse), *Minibook, Mini-Edition, Micro-world, Micro-Mark,* and *Micro-Star.*

CYBERSPEAK

Combining forms often reflect the interests and obsessions of the society that spawns them. The development of high-speed electronic computers sparked the creation of *cyber-*, a combining form abstracted from *cybernetics.* This was a word coined in 1947 by the U.S. mathematician Norbert Wiener (1894–1964) to describe a new discipline, the study of the operation of complex electronic and other systems. Wiener formed the word from a Latinate form of Greek *kybernétēs*, "steersman" + the English suffix *-ics.* As the use of computers became widespread, *cyber-* came into popular use to describe anything made possible by computers. One of the first words formed with *cyber-* was *cyberphobia*, meaning "a fear or dislike of computers." When new computer models were introduced, many users were said to suffer *cyberphobic* reactions, whose typical symptoms were nausea, vertigo, cold sweats, and sometimes hysteria. Such individuals were called *cyberphobes.*

Among other new words formed with *cyber-* were *cybertalk, cyberart, cyberfashion,* all referring to computers. A genre of science fiction having to do with computers was called *cyberpunk*, a name also applied to a computer

hacker. Sexual activity involving e-mails and Web sites was named *cybersex*, and the business of buying Internet domain names in order to sell them to companies for a profit came to be known as *cybersquatting*, its practitioners being dubbed *cybersquatters*. But by far the most important *cyber-* word had to be *cyberspace*, coined on the model of *aerospace* to describe the vast realm of online computer systems, including e-mail, graphics, files, and Internet browsing.

Some well-known combining forms had their origin in a word. *Marathon* is one such word. The modern 26-mile footraces called marathons in which thousands participate every year had their beginning in 1896, when the Olympic Games of ancient Greece were revived in Athens. The race was named after the plain of *Marathon*, situated some 25 miles northeast of Athens, where in 490 B.C.E. the Athenians defeated the Persians in a decisive battle. According to legend, news of the victory was carried to Athens by a young courier, Pheidippides, who ran all the way without stopping and fell dead as soon as he delivered the good news. The long-distance foot race was established to commemorate this young runner's feat.

The word *marathon* has also been used since the early 1900s in the extended sense of any prolonged contest, event, or other activity involving endurance, such as *a dance marathon, a chess marathon, a marathon Congressional session.* The combining forms *-athon* and *-thon* were generated from both the literal and extended senses of *marathon.* A *bikeathon*, for example, is a long-distance bicycle race, usually organized as a fundraising event, as is the extended discussion called a *talkathon*, the long-distance walking race advertised as a *walkathon*, and the popular television

broadcast to raise money for a charitable cause, known as a *telethon.* Other words formed with *-athon* or *-thon* have tended to be coined for the nonce. For example, *discothon* ("a competition among disk jockeys"), *quiltathon* ("a quilt-making contest"), *radiothon* ("a radio fundraising broadcast"), and *Bachathon* ("a series of Bach concerts").

Another combining form inspired by a word is *-aholic* or *-holic.* That word was *workaholic*, meaning "a compulsive or obsessive worker," coined in the late 1960s by Wayne Oates, an American pastoral counselor, by blending *work* and *alcoholic.* The concept of a workaholic having the addictive and compulsive personality of an alcoholic caught the public's imagination, and soon a spate of new words ending in *-(a)holic* began popping up everywhere. There were *beefaholics, carboholics* ("carbohydrate addicts"), *chocoholics* ("chocolate addicts"), *colaholics, computerholics, golfaholics, sexaholics, spendaholics, sweetaholics,* and so on.

Combining forms that are least likely to endure are those triggered by a particular event, usually in politics. A prime example of this is the combining form *-gate*, derived from *Watergate* and widely applied in the media to any scandal resembling or suggesting the Watergate scandal, which erupted during the administration of President Richard Nixon and led to his resignation in 1974. Innumerable words ending in *-gate* flooded the media all through the 1970s and a good part of the 1980s. Every scandalous political event or situation (and nonpolitical one as well) was tagged with the combining form: Cattlegate, Dallasgate, Hollywoodgate, Irangate, Koreagate, Nannygate, Oilgate, Quakergate, Sewergate. As memories of Watergate faded, the combining form that it engendered faded as well.

On the other hand, the political combining form *-nomics*, which was engendered by *Nixonomics*, referring to President Nixon's economic policies, seemed to have a longer life, though

destined to recur only after the election of a new U.S. president whose name ends with an *n*. While the awkward *Carternomics* and *Fordonomics* never caught on, *Reaganomics* and *Clintonomics* had long and successful runs in the media. We have not heard so far of *Bushonomics*.

The most likely combining forms to last are scientific, technological, and commercial ones, many of which have classical Latin and Greek roots. For example:

agri- or *agro-* "agricultural" (from Latin *agrī-*, *ager*, "field"), as in *agrichemical, agriproduct, agrobusiness, agroecosystem, agroindustry.*

flexi- or *flex-*, "flexible" (by shortening), as in *flexibacteria, flexinomics* (flexible economics), *flexiroof, flextime* or *flexitime* (flexible time in the workplace).

petro-, "petroleum" and, by extension, "oil-rich" (from Greek *pétra*, "rock"), as in *petrocrat* (an oil-rich country bureaucrat), *petrodollars* (surplus dollars of oil-exporting countries), *petrobillions, petromoney, petropolitics, petropower.*

syn-, "synthetic" (by shortening), as in *syncrude* (oil), *synfuel, syngas, synjet, synoil, synthane* (synthetic methane), *synzyme* (synthetic enzyme).

A distinctive quality of technical and scientific combining forms is the ease with which they cross language lines. Combining forms like *tele-, hydro-, electro-, -meter, -phone, -graph,* and so on, are not restricted to English but common to many languages such as French, German, Spanish, and Russian. In the 1950s, during the preparation of the 1961 *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (*W3*), its etymologists could not always determine the language in which many scientific terms, such as

electroencephalogram and *telethermometer,* were first used, since so many languages shared the combining forms that made up the terms. To solve the problem, the editor of *Webster's Third,* Philip Gove, decided to adopt a descriptive umbrella term, "International Scientific Vocabulary" (ISV), for scientific terms made up of combining forms whose language of origin was unknown. Consequently, thousands of entries in that dictionary carry the label ISV.

But just as it's doubtful that we will find a reference to that great invention, the combining form, in current language textbooks or stylebooks, so we're not likely to find in the same sources any mention of that other important innovation, the ISV label. If there is any moral to be learned from this, it is that teachers of language arts who urge their students to "look it up in the dictionary" should themselves spend some time studying its contents.

CHAPTER 23

compounding:

making new words out of old ones

The practice of forming compounds in English is of ancient origin. "The English," writes Robert Claiborne in *Our Marvelous Native Tongue* (1983), "retained the old Indo-European habit of making new words out of old ones: joining two words . . . to yield a new meaning." Old English abounded in compounds like *grindetoþum,* "molar" (literally, 'grinding tooth'), *ælmihtig,* "all-mighty," *sweordbora,* "sword-bearer," *heortsēoc,* "heart-sick," and was especially prolific in poetic compounds called kennings, a word of Old Norse origin related to English *ken.* Typical kennings were compounds like *hwælrad,* "whale-road," for the sea, and *mere-hengest,* "sea stallion," for a ship, images that influenced various English poets across the centuries. The English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89) was famous for kennings like "dapple-drawn-dawn Falcon" in his poem *The Windhover,* and "fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls" in the poem *Pied Beauty.*

There is great freedom—one might almost say license—in creating compounds. English is hardly alone in compounding; other languages indulge in it as well. Among standard Spanish words are closed compounds like *cumpleaños,* "birthday" (literally, "reach-years"), *parabrisas,* "windshield" (literally, "stop-breezes"), *ciempiés,* "centipede" (literally, "hundred feet"). Italian compounds include closed ones like *ferrovìa,* "railway," and *arcobaleno* "rainbow," and open ones, like *parola chiave,* "keyword." In German, which forms mainly closed compounds, an employment agency is called by the mouthful *Stellenvermittlungsbüro,* literally, "employment mediation bureau." French prefers open compounds like *poudre à canon,* "gunpowder," and hyphenated ones like *pot-au-feu,* "beef and vegetable stew" (literally, "pot on the fire"). And it was Greek that gave English the valuable compound *oxymoron* for a figure of speech in which two or more words are contradictory in meaning (e.g., "cruel kindness"). Greek *oxýmōron* is a compound formed from *oxýs,* "sharp" and *mōrós,* "dull."

NEWSPEAK

In an appendix to his 1949 novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* George Orwell describes in detail the official language, *Newspeak,* of a future totalitarian society in the fictitious country of Oceania. He divides the vocabulary of Newspeak into three parts, A, B, and C. The A vocabulary consisted of simple, common words like *hit, run, dog, tree, sugar, house, field.* The C vocabulary consisted entirely of scientific and technical terms. It was the B vocabulary that played the greatest role in influencing the thinking of the

people of Oceania. That was because the words were deliberately constructed to "impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them."

"The B words," writes Orwell, "were in all cases compound words. They consisted of two or more words, or portions of words, welded together in an easily pronounceable form." He cites as examples the words *goodthink*, meaning roughly "orthodoxy, conformity," *crimethink*, "thought-crime," *bellyfeel*, "a blind, enthusiastic acceptance," *sexcrime*, "sexual immorality," *goodsex*, "chastity," *joycamp*, "forced-labor camp," and *duckspeak*, "to quack like a duck." The latter, writes Orwell, "implied nothing but praise, and when the *Times* referred to one of the orators of the Party as *doubleplusgood duckspeaker* it was paying a warm and valued compliment."

In making compound words central to his artificial language, Orwell showed a deep understanding of the power of compounding words. Half-a-century-and-change later, compounds are the fastest-growing and, to critics of this productive linguistic process, among the most insidious elements in the present-day English vocabulary. The previous sentence, incidentally, includes a compound noun created ad hoc, *half-a-century-and-change*, and two compound adjectives, *fastest-growing* and *present-day*.

THE POWER OF COMPOUNDING

A casual check of a few recent newspaper and magazine issues unearthed the following sentences, in which we have italicized the compounds:

Perhaps the most noticeable trend this fall is the *full-fledged* arrival of *round-toed, high-heeled* shoes. (*New York Times*)

She had shown him a *'backdoor'* way to gain access to his *software* without a *password*. (*New York Times*)

Call him what you will—*househusband, stay-at-home* dad, *domestic engineer*. (*Reader's Digest*)

So, in the *fast-paced* and *ever-changing* world of *offshore outsourcing*, some entrepreneurs in Russia have launched . . . *denial-of-service* cyberattacks on the *Web sites* of *online* gambling companies. (*Information Week*)

The sixteen italicized compounds in these four quotations illustrate the wide variety characterizing this type of formation. They include the closed compounds *backdoor, software, password, househusband, offshore, outsourcing,* and *online*; the hyphenated compounds *full-fledged, round-toed, high-heeled, fast-paced, ever-changing, stay-at-home,* and *denial-of-service*; and the open compounds *domestic engineer* and *Web site*. Notice that the closed compounds tend to be nouns, while the hyphenated ones tend to be adjectives. As for the open compounds, they too tend to be nouns, like the closed ones. That is why many write *Web site* as a closed compound, *Website* or *website*. Nobody, however, would write *domestic engineer* as a closed compound, simply because it would be too long a word. As a rule, a closed compound consists of two short words combined to form a solid unit, as if it were a single word, for example, *steamboat, roughneck, bookworm*.

Granted that there may be an overuse of compounds, there is no denying their power in expressing complex ideas in a succinct and often memorable way. Take the compound verb *stonewall*, meaning "to obstruct (an investigation, etc.)," which

emerged in 1973–74 during the Watergate hearings. The image of a stone wall far more effectively conveys the idea of a solid obstruction than the word *obstruction* does. Just as a picture is worth a thousand words, a picturesque word or phrase is worth a dozen trite ones. Similarly, the informal compound *no-brainer* manages to impart tersely the idea that *this is something that requires little thought or effort to understand or do,* so that, barring repeated use, *no-brainer* serves a useful purpose in communication.

One might ask, on the other hand, what possible service is rendered by many nonce or ad-hoc compounds, as in the following excerpts from an issue of *eWeek,* a weekly newsmagazine:

> The TestView suite includes Web-testing components and provides enterprise-level test management capabilities.
>
> Numerous products are available . . . , ranging from free-standing overlay defensive networks to single-point-in-time-and-space detection programs.

These sentences are technical and intended for professionals in the field of electronics. Still, one questions the necessity of complex collocations like "enterprise-level test management capabilities" and "free-standing overlay defensive networks," not to mention "single-point-in-time-and-space detection programs," a specification that Einstein might find hard to swallow, if not to fathom.

There is a pattern in the development of compounds. Compound nouns usually begin life as two single-syllable words separated by a space, then are joined by a hyphen, and finally coalesce into one word, thus: *boy friend, boy-friend, boyfriend; loan word, loan-word, loanword.* There is a span of time in which all three forms may coexist uneasily, a situation that is known to have driven many a dictionary maker to distraction. Generally,

though, at least in American English, compound nouns consisting of two short words eventually close up and become one, as we see in words like *bathroom, blackboard, footstool, typewriter,* and *girlfriend.* By contrast, compound nouns made up of three or more words will tend to remain hyphenated: *son-in-law, daughter-in-law, mother-of-pearl, attorney-at-law, happy-go-lucky.* Finally, there are many compound nouns that remain open, such as *ice cream, high school, legal aid, patrol car, post office, maid of honor, editor in chief,* and *glove compartment,* either because they consist of more than two syllables, or simply by convention. (In defiance of convention, some have taken to changing open compounds to closed or hyphenated ones, writing them *highschool, icecream, editor-in-chief, maid-of-honor.*) If you are uncertain whether a compound is closed, hyphenated, or open, you are advised to consult a current dictionary.

HOW TO MAKE A COMPOUND WORD

Some scholars have categorized compounds as being of two types, either native formations, like *coffeehouse, livingroom,* and *steamboat,* or formed on Latin and Greek patterns, as *agriculture, horticulture, neurology,* and *photography.* We think this is a mistake. The subject of compounds is complicated enough without compounding—if you excuse the pun—its difficulty by including in it words made up of affixes and combining forms, like *biology* and *orthography.* These so-called classical forms are best treated as derivatives (and will be discussed in the appropriate chapter). Our definition of a compound is that of a word whose parts are themselves words, and not parts of words.

So, let's say you wish to form a new compound. The first thing to know is that you can join words from just about any part of speech to create a compound:

from a noun and a noun: *football, sunscreen, blood test*

a noun and an adjective: *airtight, age-old, camera-shy*

a noun and a participle: *heartbroken, earsplitting, dog-eared*

a noun and a verb: *browbeat, sidestep, force-feed*

an adjective and a noun: *redcap, first-class, solar wind*

an adjective and a verb: *highlight, fine-tune, quick-freeze*

a verb and a noun: *blowtorch, flashlight, password*

a verb and an adverb: *breakup, dugout, drive-by*

an adverb and a verb: *bypass, download, outcome, upkeep*

an adverb and an adjective: *evergreen, outspoken, upswept*

And so on.

There are two kinds of compounds: those that are self-explanatory, such as *armchair, footrest, barbed wire, science fiction, businessman;* and those whose meanings are opaque or obscure and require explanation. Among the latter are such compounds as *greenhouse,* "place for cultivating plants" (not the same as a *green house*), *holiday* (not the same as a *holy day*), *comeback,* "clever retort" (not the same as *come back,* "return"), *red tape,* "bureaucratic routine" (not *a red-colored tape*), *real estate,* "property" (not *an estate that is real*). In speech, understanding the meaning of a compound often depends on where the stress is placed. In a compound, the stress usually falls on the first word: GREENhouse, COME-back, RED tape, REAL estate. Where the two words are not intended as a unit, the stress will be relatively even: compare the compound *Lookout Cliff,* a place name, pronounced LOOKout Cliff, with the phrase *Look out! Cliff!,* pronounced LOOK OUT! CLIFF!

The ease with which compounds enter the language also facilitates their exit. Unless they are truly essential, most compounds last a short time, perhaps a few years, and quietly slip out of usage. Every decade or so, dictionary editors make a clean sweep of old and abandoned compounds in order to make room for new ones. The following compounds, formed in the 1960s, have gone out of use and are no longer included in standard dictionaries:

blue movie A pornographic movie

cushioncraft A craft that rides on a cushion of air

dataphone A telephone that transmits data

education park A group of schools built on a park

feedforward The control of feedback at the input end

granny dress A loose, long-sleeved, ankle-long dress

Hong Kong flu A form of Asian flu

incinderjell An incendiary gel used in flamethrowers

jet-hop To travel by jet aircraft

This sampling of dated compounds can be multiplied as one goes back in time. As fashions, interests, and situations change, compounds are among the first elements in the vocabulary to vanish and be replaced by newer compounds, which in turn might one day also face extinction. That fate is true, to some extent, of most words (except the basic function words) and, of course, of most living things.

CHAPTER 24

derivation:

forming many words from a single word

Toward the end of the last century, the English language was infected by a rash of *iveitis.* Words ending in *-ive* began showing up everywhere, especially in self-help articles and books: *preventive, supportive, assertive, coercive,* and so forth. The author William Safire, in *What's the Good Word?* (1982), called it punningly "an outbreak of *ives,*" adding that about 2,000 words ended in *-ive,* four-fifths of them in the form *-tive.* Why the outbreak? One answer seemed to be that, unlike other adjectives (*a helpful spouse, a strong attitude, a forceful manner*), words ending in *-ive* (*a supportive spouse, an assertive attitude, a coercive manner*) imply a permanent or habitual quality, something that professionals in the social sciences, who like to sound definitive or conclusive, find highly attractive and, yes, positive. (The last four are adjectives in *-ive,* as the word *adjective* itself is, that's how entrenched the usage is.)

VERY ADDICTIVE DERIVATIVES

What this little history tells us is that words, like viruses, are catching, contagious. They are literally communicable. People afflicted with *ives* will always choose the words *addictive, causative, evaluative, executive, permissive, preemptive, proactive, procreative, preventative, preventive,* and so on, over other alternatives, *alternative* being one of them. There are many examples of this form of verbal contagion. One that has created considerable controversy is the group of verbs ending in *-ize.* Sometime in the last century, words in *-ize* became especially productive, and, as they multiplied, many of them were bitterly condemned by critics. While some of the new coinages were so peculiar that they disappeared almost overnight (*friendlyize, picturize, uniformize, reflectorize*), a good many took up full-time residence in the language, words like *accessorize, burglarize, glamorize, moisturize,* and *personalize.* Yet even a word like *jeopardize,* which had been in the language since the 1640s, took the brunt of censure. Here's what J. Lesslie Hall, who defended the word, wrote in his book, *English Usage,* in 1917:

> Some rhetorical scholars and many purists will not tolerate *jeopardize;* but say we must use *jeopard.* T. L. K. Oliphant calls it 'barbarous.' Quackenbos calls it 'a monstrosity,' and says we might as well say 'walkize,' 'singize'. . . . William Cullen Bryant put it on his forbidden list.

Yet this was nothing compared to the virulent attacks leveled at *finalize* and *prioritize.* The former, in particular, was widely condemned after its inclusion in the newly published *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* in 1961. *Prioritize,* too, received its share of obloquy and ridicule, as in this parody of social-science jargon published by the critic Edwin Newman in *The*

New York Times (January 16, 1977) under the title "My College Essay": "I do have a special interest, based on what I hope is a creative self-perception. It is to upgrade my potential. When I prioritize my goals/objectives, that comes first."

If one doesn't hear much public criticism these days of *finalize* and kindred words, it's probably because they no longer raise the hackles of editors and English teachers. It seems that ultimately no amount of criticism can halt the spread of new coinages formed by analogy; even as *prioritize* was being ridiculed, new verbs in *-ize* were making their debut: *strategize* ("to devise strategies"), *suboptimize* ("to make optimal use of subsystems"), *colorize* ("to enhance with color by computer"), and so on.

The coinage of many new words in *-ive* and *-ize* is typical of the process of derivation, which is the most productive process of word formation. Words like *rightly, rightness, righteous, righteously, righteousness,* all extensions of the word *right,* are traditionally called *derivatives,* a term that comes from Latin *derivare,* meaning literally "to draw off from a stream" (from *rivus,* "stream"), since the longer words are *derived* or drawn off the short word like water from a stream.

Some linguists prefer to use the fancier word *paronym* instead of *derivative* for such a word (from Greek *paronymon,* "side name"). The trouble is that they define a paronym kind of circuitously as "a word related to another by derivation, as *derivation* and *derivative* are derived from *derive,* thus being paronyms of *derive.*" And as if this were not confusing enough, some prefer calling derivatives by still another name, "conjugate words." We choose to stick to the traditional term *derivation* for the process of forming words like *beautiful, beautify, beauteous,* and *beautician* from the simple word *beauty.* By the same token, *beautifully* can be called a derivative of *beautiful,* and *beautifier* and *beautification* can be viewed as derivatives of *beautify.*

Almost every part of speech is involved in derivation. Through derivation, adjectives are formed from nouns (*lovable* from *love*), nouns from verbs (*computer* from *compute*), adjectives from verbs (*conceivable* from *conceive*), nouns from nouns (*indexcation* from *index*), and verbs from nouns (*prioritize* from *priority*). Derivation is also involved in processes like **back-formation, functional shift,** and the formation of **diminutives.**

HOW TO MAKE DERIVATIVES

Derivation consists chiefly of adding suffixes or prefixes to base words. The words *personal, personally, personality, personalize* were derived from *person* by attaching the suffixes *-al, -ly, -ity,* and *-ize.* The words *nonachiever, nonevent, nonhuman,* and *nonstandard* were derived from *achiever, event, human,* and *standard* by attaching to them the prefix *non-*. The sesquipedalian word *antidisestablishmentarianism* (meaning, seriously, "opposition to those who oppose establishment of a state religion") was derived from the noun *establishment* (itself derived from the verb *establish* and the suffix *-ment*) through the addition of the prefixes *anti-* and *dis-* and the suffixes *-arian* and *-ism.*

Some linguists include under derivation the process of inflection, which refers to the grammatical changes that a word undergoes to indicate number, person, or tense. In this process, the suffixes *-ed* and *-ing* attach to a verb to form the past tense and the present participle (*brewed, brewing*); the suffix *-s* or *-es* attaches to a noun to form the plural (*books, dresses*); the suffixes *-er, -est* attach to an adjective to indicate the comparative and superlative forms (*smaller, smallest*). Others take note of basic differences between the two processes and prefer to keep inflection separate from derivation.

Derivatives sometimes differ in meaning substantially from their base words. The terms *gentrify* and *gentrification,* denoting the

practice of upgrading a poor, run-down property or neighborhood to raise its value, were derived from *gentry*, a word referring to aristocracy or nobility, neither of which have much to do with poor, neglected urban areas. Indeed, the terms, coined by real-estate developers, were criticized at first as pretentious and snobbish, but for want of better ones, they stuck. Likewise the terms *destabilize* and *destabilization*, coined by government intelligence agencies, did not mean to render something unstable, but to topple a foreign government by covert actions. These derivatives are also examples of **euphemisms**.

The term *desertification*, by contrast, designates a serious and straightforward problem in various countries, Spain being the latest among them. There is no verb *desertify*; *desertification* was derived from *desert* by addition of the suffix *-ification*, on the analogy of such words as *ossification* ("conversion into bone") and *petrification* ("conversion into stone"), and it denotes the process by which fertile land turns barren as a nearby desert gradually intrudes.

Similar to *-ification*, the suffix *-ization* became specialized as an attachment to the names of various countries. Originally this double suffix (from *-ize* and *-ation*) meant the act or process of becoming (American, English, etc.), as in *Americanization, anglicization*. But with the end of colonialism in many countries, the suffix took on several new meanings: (1) "the transfer of political power and authority to the native peoples of (a country)," as in *Indianization, Jordanization, Moroccanization*; (2) "the act or practice of nationalizing foreign possessions in (a country)," as in *Egyptianizton, Algerianization, Nigerianization*; (3) "the transfer of the conduct of a war to native forces of (a country)," as in *Vietnamization, Iraqization*.

Derivatives of proper names appear in a variety of forms. Among them are those that end in:

-(i)an: Bartokian, Bellovian (Saul Bellow), Chaucerian, Churchillian, Darwinian, Dickensian, Freudian, Nabokovian, Orwellian, Shakespearian, Shavian (George Bernard Shaw), Tolstoyan, Wagnerian, Wordsworthian;

-esque: Chaplinesque, Dantesque, Fanonesque, Haydenesque, Kafkaesque;

-ism/-ist: Calvinism/Calvinist, Darwinism/Darwinist, Marxism/Marxist;

-ite: Clintonite, McCarthyite, Nixonite, Reaganite, Trotskyite.

An interesting example of the derivational possibilities in proper names is found in the writings of the American neurologist Oliver Sacks about Tourette's syndrome, a neurological condition marked by tics and involuntary noises and movements. In several of his books and articles (e.g., *New Yorker*, August 23, 2004), he employs various derivative forms of the syndrome's name. He shortens the name to *Tourette's* ("Some people with Tourette's are able to catch flies on the wing"). He employs the lowercase synonym *tourettism* for the name ("Not just the speed but the quality of movement and thought is altered in tourettism . . ."). He uses the lowercase adjective *tourettic* ("My tourettic patient Ray . . . Tourettic or post-encephalitic speed goes with disinhibition"). In *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Tom McArthur adds to this list some rare derivatives, such as the adverbs *Tourettically* and *Tourettishly*, the informal adjectives *Touretty* and *Tourettish*, and the noun *Touretter*, for someone who has the syndrome. This has been done with other disorders, for example, *parkinsonism* (for *Parkinson's disease*) and *parkinsonian*, but perhaps not as extensively.

Advances in science, commerce, and technology stimulate

the creation of derivatives. Interest in the environment and ecology made the prefix *eco-*, "ecological" productive, leading to the formation of derivatives like *ecocatastrophe, ecodevelopment, ecodoom, ecodoomster* ("a predictor of ecodoom"), *ecofreak* (slang for "an ardent environmentalist"), *ecomone* ("an ecological hormone"), *econiche, econut* (slang synonym of *ecofreak*), *ecopolitics, ecotage* ("sabotage of environmental polluters"), and so on. Science contributed many new derivatives, especially in physics. The American physicist Olexa-Myron Bilaniuk coined the term *tardyon* (from *tardy*, "late") for a subatomic particle that moves slower than the speed of light, modeling it on *tachyon* (from Greek *tachys*, "swift"), a hypothetical particle that moves faster than the speed of light.

Since the invention of the Internet, the most common derivative terms are produced in cyberspace through the merger of commerce and technology. The formative element *e-* or *E-* (abbreviation of *electronic*) has produced innumerable coinages that are instantly recognized by Web site surfers and we are not just referring to *e-mail* or *email*. Examples of *e-* and *E-* words include *eBay* (electronic buy-by-bidding), *E-commerce* (and its variant, *E-business*), *E*Trade* ("electronic stock trading"), *E-cards* (what used to be called greeting cards), *eNature* ("online field guides"), *eMedicine* ("online medical journals"), *e-financing, e-gold, E-mentoring, e-library, ePALS* (classroom exchange), *eMusic, eMuseum*, and even *eHow* (instructions on how to do everything).

A close competitor of the *e-* or *E-* prefix is the *i-* or *I-* prefix (abbreviation of *Internet*), featured in the names of enterprises like *iTools* (Internet tools), *iTunes* (digital jukebox), *Ifilm* (popular movies), and *iVillage* (a search engine). Some of the names bear more than a slight hint of the influence of the first-person singular *I*, as for example a search engine for cash prizes called

iWon. Another goes a step further by attaching the *i-* prefix to an appropriate acronym for Education and Resource Network, thereby coming up with the irresistible name *iEarn*. (See the chapters on **Abbreviations and Acronyms** and **Prefixes and Suffixes**.)

CHAPTER 25

eponyms:

what's in a name? sometimes a word or a phrase

An eponym (from Greek *eponymos*, "named for") is a word or phrase derived from a name. The name may be real, imaginary, literary, biblical, or mythical. It may be the name of a person (usually the surname), such as *Ampere, Caesar, Lynch, Maverick,* or the name of a place, such as *Babel, Cologne, Java, Limerick.* The words derived from the names may be nouns, such as *boycott, cardigan, leotard, sandwich;* or they may be adjectives, such as *herculean, platonic, saturnine,* and *venereal;* or they may be verbs, such as *mesmerize, pasteurize, shanghai, tantalize,* and *vulcanize.*

Eponyms may also be **clippings** like *dunce* (a term of ridicule clipped from the name of the medieval scholar John *Duns* Scotus) and *tawdry* "cheap and showy" (clipped from Saint *Audrey's lace*), **blends** like *gerrymander* and *Eurasia,* and **compounds** like *Doberman pinscher, Molotov cocktail,* and *Heimlich maneuver.* Eponyms have contributed thousands of words to the language.

One use of eponyms is figurative or symbolic. When someone says "That child is destined to be an Einstein," we know exactly what the speaker means, even though there is no dictionary entry that defines "Einstein" as "a genius." The speaker is making a comparison or allusion to Albert Einstein, who was regarded as the foremost genius of the last century. Likewise, one might refer to an extremely wealthy person as "a Rockefeller," after the famous American family of oil magnates; or call a talented singer "a Caruso," after the great operatic tenor Enrico Caruso. The name *Webster* or *Webster's* (after Noah Webster, who published in 1828 the first American dictionary) has been a synonym for a dictionary since 1928. It is not uncommon to overhear a customer in a bookstore asking for a "Webster," or for a schoolteacher to tell pupils that "Webster doesn't approve" of such-and-such a usage. In all these cases, the names are capitalized, and the speakers or writers are aware, however vaguely, of alluding to real people or their works. Eponyms like these hover on the border between proper names and common nouns. The works of artists and fashion designers are also commonly called by the name of their creators. For example, "The museum owns three Van Goghs and two Gaugins." "She wore a Chanel to the Oscars, a Dior to the Emmys, and a Donna Karan to the Tonys."

Allusive eponyms often come from the Bible or from literature. Examples include such epithets as *a doubting Thomas, a Jezebel* (a wicked woman), *a Solomon* (a very wise man), *a Nimrod* (a skilled hunter), *a Judas* (a traitor), *a Shylock* (a vengeful moneylender), *a Pollyanna* (an eternal optimist), *a Mrs. Grundy* (a narrow-minded person who is critical of every breach of convention). One might describe a man as a *Casanova,* in allusion to Giovanni Casanova, an Italian writer of the 1700s noted for his amorous adventures. Similar types have been called a *Don Juan* (after a legendary Spanish lover called Don Juan Tenorio), a *Lothario* (after a young se-

ducer in a popular play of the 1700s, *The Fair Penitent*), or a *Romeo* (after the romantic lover in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*).

Close to allusive eponyms are the names of many diseases and disorders. Most derive from the names of the physicians who discovered or described them (e.g., *Alzheimer's disease, Hodgkin's disease, Down syndrome, Tourette's syndrome*), though sometimes they are named after a famous sufferer (*Lou Gehrig's disease*). Medical eponyms also include names of body parts, symptoms, and surgical procedures (e.g., *Meckel's ligament, Still's rash, Babinski reflex, Cockett and Dodd operation*). Some collectors have recorded over 7,000 medical eponyms. All of them spell the eponymous name with an initial capital. In a few cases, a common noun is derived from the name of the medical condition or disease, *parkinsonism,* derived from *Parkinson's disease, tourettism,* derived from *Tourette's syndrome.* (See the chapter on **Derivation.**)

UNCAPITALIZED EPONYMS

The best-known eponyms are those that function as common nouns and are not capitalized within a sentence. They are no longer connected in the minds of users with the proper names from which they originated and are treated like everyday words. Early examples of such eponyms include *bedlam, guy, pander, pandemonium,* and *tawdry.* Pronunciation changes obscured the origin of *bedlam,* denoting "a scene of commotion and confusion, a virtual madhouse." The word was a figurative use of the name *Bedlam,* used in the 1600s as a short name for (*St. Mary of*) *Bethlehem,* an insane asylum in London, England. *Bethlehem* was pronounced *Bedlam* before the name began to be used figuratively.

The word *guy* originated in England in the 1800s as the name of a somewhat tattered effigy of *Guy Fawkes* (1570–1606), who led the failed "Gunpowder Plot" to blow up the British monarch

and Parliament in 1605. Effigies of Guy Fawkes were carried in a procession and burned on November 5, the anniversary of the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. The word was used in England to refer to a figure of ridicule, but in the United States it became a colloquial term for any man or fellow.

The verb *pander,* meaning "to act as a go-between or procurer," is found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor,* originally as a noun meaning "a go-between, a procurer." The noun was derived from *Pandarus,* the name of Cressida's uncle, who acted as a go-between for Troilus to procure Cressida's love for him. The verb was derived from the noun.

The noun *pandemonium,* meaning "a chaotic uproar or tumult," or "a place of such tumult," is a figurative use of *Pandemonium,* coined by John Milton in *Paradise Lost* as the name of Satan's palace rising out of Chaos to become the center or capital of Hell. Milton coined the name from Greek *pan-,* "all" + Latin *daemonium,* "evil spirit, demon."

Most modern eponyms tend to be the names of people noted for something and turned into common nouns without any other change in the spelling than loss of the initial capital letter. The most famous among such terms is *boycott* ("to boycott a business, a product, etc."; "a boycott against a store"), since it was adopted by many languages to refer to any organized campaign to refuse to deal with someone or something (French *boycott, boycotter;* German *Boykott, boykottieren;* Spanish *boicoteo, boicotear*). The English term (both as verb and noun) came from the name of Captain Charles C. *Boycott* (1832–97), an English land agent who refused to lower the rents of Irish tenant farmers and was consequently subjected to a "boycott" by the tenants.

Running neck and neck with *boycott* in international use is *sandwich,* named after the Earl of *Sandwich* (1718–92), in allu-

sion to his habit of consuming nothing but some slices of meat between slices of bread while spending long hours at gaming tables. His actual name was John Montagu, and had that been well-known, we might be eating "montagus" instead of sandwiches.

An American eponym that also attained international renown is the verb *lynch*, meaning "to put someone to death without a lawful trial," especially by a mob. Originally (1830s) the term meant to whip or otherwise punish corporeally an accused person without a lawful trial, and was derived from *Lynch law*, in allusion to William *Lynch* (1742–1820), a Virginian who in 1780 organized a vigilante committee to punish those accused of committing crimes in his county. Over the years the term came to mean passing and carrying out a sentence of death, usually by hanging, without subjecting the accused to a lawful trial.

Other notable words derived from names include:

atlas, a book or collection of maps; so called from the picture of Atlas, the Titan, supporting the heavens or the world on the front cover of early collections of maps. The mythical Atlas fought an unsuccessful war against Zeus, who condemned him to bear the heavens (usually depicted as the terrestrial globe) on his shoulders.

Babbitt or ***babbitt***, a complacent, conventional middle-class businessman; named after George F. *Babbitt*, the main character in the novel *Babbitt* (1922) by the American novelist Sinclair Lewis. The word *Babbittry* was derived from the eponym.

blarney, smooth-talking flattery; named after the *Blarney* Stone, an inscribed stone in a position difficult to reach

inside the Castle of Blarney, a village near Cork, Ireland. According to popular legend, anyone who manages to gain access to the stone and to kiss it is supposed to have thereafter a cajoling tongue and the ability to flatter and tell lies effortlessly. Lady Blarney, a smooth-talking fine lady in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, was named in allusion to the Blarney Stone.

bunk, empty talk, humbug, nonsense; a shortening of *bunkum*, named after the county of *Buncombe*, North Carolina, originally in the phrase "to talk for Buncombe (or Bunkum)," meaning "to make a long, meaningless speech." The phrase originated in a long, dull speech made in 1820 before the U.S. Congress by Congressman Felix Walker, who represented a district that included Buncombe County. When he was repeatedly interrupted by his colleagues, Walker explained apologetically that he was compelled to "talk for Buncombe." The verb *debunk*, "to expose humbug," was coined in 1923. The term *hokum*, a synonym of *bunk*, was formed about the same time by blending *hocus-(pocus)* and *bunkum*.

cardigan, a sweater or jacket that opens down the front; named after the 7th Earl of *Cardigan* (J. T. Brudnell), 1797–1868, who wore such a jacket when he led the heroic Charge of the Light Brigade (Sept. 26, 1854) during the Crimean War. Compare *raglan*.

cashmere, a fine wool; named for *Cashmere* (now *Kashmir*), a region in the Himalayas where this wool is obtained from the long-haired goats bred there.

chauvinism, exaggerated, militant patriotism; so called (through French *chauvinisme*) from the name of Nicholas

Chauvin, a wounded French veteran of the Napoleonic wars famed for his unconditional devotion to Napoleon and the Empire, who was at first admired, but, after Napoleon's downfall, ridiculed for his excessive patriotism, especially as his name was popularized in a famous 1831 vaudeville, *La Cocarde Tricolore* ("The Three-colored Cockade").

derby, a stiff felt hat with rounded crown and narrow brim; named for the *Derby*, the most important annual horse race in England, at which men wore this kind of hat. The Derby was founded by the 12th Earl of *Derby* in 1780, after the county of this name in central England.

derrick, a crane for lifting heavy weights; originally, a structure for hanging someone, a gallows, named after *Derick*, surname of a noted hangman of the Tyburn gallows in London during the 1600s.

dunce, a stupid person; originally spelled *Duns*, clipped from the name of John *Duns* Scotus (c. 1265–1308), a teacher of theology and philosophy at Oxford who challenged the basic teachings of Thomas Aquinas. Followers of Aquinas attacked the disciples of Scotus, calling the "Dunsmen" or "Dunses" nitpicking sophists, and finally equating them with fools and blockheads, which led to the word's present meaning.

guillotine, a device with a large blade for beheading people; named (through French) for Joseph Ignace *Guillotin* (1738–1814), a French physician who was a member of the Constituent Assembly in 1789 when he proposed that those condemned to death should be beheaded by a machine, which would be quicker and more humane than

the methods used until then by executioners. Though the machine he recommended was not invented until 1791, it was named after him as though he had been its inventor.

hector, to bully; from earlier noun *Hector*, any of a gang of bullies roaming the streets of London during the 1600s, named for *Hector*, the champion of Troy in *The Iliad*, who fought the Greeks in a bullying fashion.

malapropism, a ridiculously inappropriate use of words; derived from *Mrs. Malaprop*, a character in Richard Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals* (1775), who regularly misapplies long words by replacing the intended word with one that merely sounds like it, as in "as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile." The name was coined by Sheridan from the adverb *malapropos* "inappropriately," borrowed from French *mal à propos*, (literally) "badly for the purpose."

maverick, an individualist, a political independent; (originally) an animal unmarked with a brand; named after Samuel A. *Maverick* (1803–70), a Texas rancher who refused to brand his cattle, saying that branding was a cruel practice. His neighbors accused him of lying, since not branding allowed Maverick to claim any unbranded cattle on the range as his. This led to long-term fighting between Maverick and his neighbors. By the turn of the century, *maverick* had taken on the meaning of someone independent and unconventional, especially a politician who breaks away from his party to run on an independent ticket.

mentor, a trusted guide and advisor; named after *Mentor*, the faithful friend of Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey*. When

Telemachus, the son of Ulysses, sets out in search of his father at the end of the Trojan War, the goddess Athene assumes the form of Mentor when she accompanies Telemachus as guide and adviser in his search.

morphine, a drug extracted from opium; derived (through French and German) after *Morpheus*, the Roman god of dreams, son of the god of sleep. The name *Morpheus* was coined by Ovid from Greek *morphe*, "form," in allusion to the shapes visualized in dreams. The drug was named in reference to its sleep-inducing properties.

pompadour, an upswept style of hair; named after the Marquise de *Pompadour* (Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, 1721–64), the mistress of Louis XV of France, who wore her hair in this style. A noted patroness of art and literature, not only her hairdo but the fashions and colors she exhibited were named after her and widely imitated. It was she who made the oft-quoted remark, *Apres nous le déluge!* "After us, the deluge!"

raglan, a loose overcoat with sleeves extending to the collar; named after Lord *Raglan* (1788–1855), a British field marshal who wore such a coat during the Crimean War. Compare *cardigan*.

silhouette, a portrait made by tracing the outline of a profile, figure, and so on; named after Étienne de *Silhouette* (1709–67), the controller of finances in France in 1759. Calling an outline portrait a *silhouette* was supposed to ridicule the petty economies introduced by Silhouette, since it was a cheap way of making a portrait instead of having it painted by an artist. Another account takes the portrait name to be a sarcastic reference to Silhouette's

short tenure of eight months in office. Still another explanation for the name is that Silhouette himself decorated the walls of his chateau with outline portraits instead of spending money on paintings.

Other interesting eponyms are *limousine, macadam, mackintosh, masochism, maudlin, mayonnaise, meander, nemesis, oxford, panama, pullman, shrapnel, sodomy, spaniel, spartan, turkey, tuxedo, worsted,* and *zeppelin.*

Words derived from names of scientists include *ampere, angstrom, celsius, fabrenheit, farad, faraday, joule, ohm, volt,* and *watt.*

Plant names derived from the names of persons include *begonia, bougainvillea, camellia, dahlia, poinciana, poinsettia, wisteria,* and *zinnia.*

Words derived from the names of famous authors include *Chaucerian, Dantesque, Kafkaesque, Machiavellian, Nabokovian, Orwellian, Rabelaisian, Shakespearian, Shavian, Swiftian, Tolstoyan.*

Words derived from place names include *bikini, calico, canter, champagne, cologne, damask, denim, gauze, jeans, sardonic, shanghai, sherry,* and *stygian.*

MODERN EPONYMS

ARCHIE BUNKER, a type of working-class bigot; from the name of a television character in the sitcom series *All in the Family*, which premiered in January 1971.

BORK, a verb meaning to attack a political candidate, especially in the media; named after Judge Robert H. *Bork*, whose nomination to the Supreme Court in 1987 was rejected by the Senate after an extensive media attack by his opponents.

QUISLING, a traitor who cooperates with the enemy;

named after Major Vidkun *Quisling*, who headed Norway's puppet government under the Nazis in World War II and was executed for treason in 1945.

SOLON, a lawgiver (often used in headlines instead of "legislator" to save space); named for *Solon* (ab. 638–558 B.C.E.), an Athenian statesman and lawgiver.

STRANGELOVE, a military strategist who plans large-scale nuclear warfare; named after Dr. *Strangelove*, a mad military planner in the 1964 motion picture "Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb," directed by Stanley Kubrick.

WATERGATE, a major political scandal; named for the *Watergate* building complex in Washington, D.C., where an attempt to break into the offices of the Democratic National Committee in 1972 led to a political scandal in President Richard Nixon's administration.

To list and explain all the eponyms that have come into English would take up an entire book. Indeed, a number of dictionaries of eponyms, listing thousands of names that have become part of the language, have been published. Recent ones include: *A New Dictionary of Eponyms*, by Morton S. Freeman (Oxford University Press, 1997), *Elsevier's Dictionary of Eponyms*, by Rogerio A. Latuse (Elsevier Science Ltd, 2001), and *Chambers Dictionary of Eponyms*, by Martin Manser (Chambers Harrap Publishers Ltd, 2004).

CHAPTER 26

neologisms:

how long does a new word remain new?

A neologism (from French *néologisme*, formed from Greek *néos*, "new," and *lógos* "word") is a technical term for what we ordinarily call a new word. When a neologism first appears in speech or writing, it may startle and puzzle because of its strangeness. You wonder what it means, where it came from, how it is pronounced, and whether it is acceptable in Standard English or merely a voguish or slangy usage. Many technical and semitechnical terms are considered neologisms for a long time. A scientific term like *graviton* ("the unit of gravitational force") sounds like a new word, but it has been used in physics since the 1940s. The term *twigloo* (a blend of *twig* and *igloo*), a kind of temporary shelter made of twigs by environmentalists protecting forests, is a 1990s term that still seems new because of its relative rareness.

True neologisms are either words taken from another language, such as the sing-along entertainment *karaoke* (from Japanese) and the popular dessert *tiramisu* (from Italian), or pure coinages like *kludge,* "any clumsily improvised system" and the number *googol* (see the chapter on **Coinages**). Most neologisms, however, are based on some earlier word or words. In the 1970s, the word collector Willard R. Espy coined the word *semordnilap* for words that spell another word in reverse, such as *doom, straw,* and *repaid.* He made up his new word by simply reversing the spelling of *palindromes,* which is the term for words or phrases that spell the same word or phrase forward and backward, such as the words *level* and *noon,* the name *Eve,* the sentence *Madam, I'm Adam,* and the language name *Malayalam.*

A more recent example of a neologism is *phishing.* A front-page article in *The New York Times* of March 24, 2004, informed the reader that *phishing,* defined as identity theft through fake e-mail messages and Web sites, "got its name a decade ago when America Online charged users by the hour. Teenagers sent e-mail and instant messages pretending to be AOL customer service agents in order to fish—or phish—for account identification and passwords they could use to stay online at someone else's expense." At first glance, it would seem that the word was coined by blending the phrase *phony fishing* into *phishing.* But probably a broader influence was the practice in American slang of whimsically changing initial *f* to *ph,* as in *phat* "great, wonderful" (altered from *fat* in the 1960s), *phone phreak,* "one who uses electronic devices to place long-distance calls," (common in the 1970s), and *phooey,* a variant of *fooey,* popularized in the 1920s. *Phishing* and the derivative *phisher,* for one who *phishes* or sends fraudulent e-mails, are neologisms bound to become commonplace as Internet servers warn their customers to beware of phishers disguised as official messages and asking for personal information.

THE BACKLASH

Words like *semordnilap, twigloo,* and *phishing* are technical coinages used within narrow or specialized contexts and therefore bother no one. There are, however, neologisms that raise the hackles of people who find them pretentious, ungrammatical, unnecessary, or offensive blots on the language. These neologisms tend to be common, everyday words one finds in a daily paper or hears on a radio or TV show, and people who cannot bear seeing or hearing them are usually language conservatives who wish to keep the mother tongue free of contamination and impurity. It might surprise many speakers today that standard words like *accountable, donate, enthused, practitioner, presidential,* and *reliable* were roundly condemned and ridiculed by influential critics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For many years, the verbs *finalize* and *prioritize,* the adjective *preventative,* and the sentence-modifying adverb *hopefully* were criticized and condemned by language purists. These words were eventually accepted by most users of English and incorporated in standard dictionaries, although from time to time someone raises an objection to using *finalize, legitimize,* or some other word ending in *-ize.*

Since neologisms generally remain "new" for a relatively short time, dictionaries of neologisms tend to be short-lived. A great many of the neologisms recorded in the three volumes of the *Barnhart Dictionary of New English* (1973, 1980, 1990) found their way into standard dictionaries and can no longer be considered "new words." The same can be said of a more recent work, *The Oxford Dictionary of New Words,* second edition, published in 1997. Since the original edition appeared in 1991, many of its entries, such as *cyber-, e-mail, hip-hop, outsource,* and *sleazebag,* have made their way into college-level dictionaries and can hardly be regarded as "new."

TRACKING NEOLOGISMS

For those interested in keeping track of neologisms, there are periodicals and Web sites that provide information on the latest entries into the language. A useful source is the bimonthly *Copy Editor*, which not only comments frequently on neologisms, but features a regular "Dictionary Update" column, edited by Jesse Sheidlower, which presents in dictionary format current neologisms culled from the files of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The April–May 2005 column, for example, lists among others the terms *baby tee*, "A tight-fitting, esp. cropped T-shirt, intended to be worn by adult women," *krumping*, "A form of fast dancing associated with hip-hop culture, usually performed competitively," and *vlog*, "A blog that incorporates video clips." These entries are illustrated by citations from various newspapers and magazines such as *Vanity Fair, Los Angeles Times, Rolling Stone, Time,* and *Business Week*.

TIRED AND EXPIRED

An amusing example from *Copy Editor* is a boxed listing of what it calls Internet clichés, which appeared in its December 2001–January 2002 issue. The list purports to show how quickly neologisms become trite from overuse:

E- Short for *electronic*, this was named Word of the Year in 1998 by the American Dialect Society. But, oh, how soon it became a cliché, in *e-commerce, e-business, e-payments, e-tailing* and, of course, the names of businesses like *eBay, E*Trade*, and *eSchwab*.

META- From the Greek for "after" or "beyond," this combining form showed up everywhere, from science fiction (Neil Stephenson's *metaverse*) to the Web (*meta tags*).

SMART It's not fresh, and it's certainly not smart. Forget *smart transmitters, smart phones,* and *smart appliances.*

ÜBER- The days for this German prefix are, literally, over. Bury *übergeek, überhip,* and *übercool.* [Not quite over, we fear. From *The New York Times Book Review* of October 17, 2004: "Stephen King . . . has folded in characters from his non 'Dark Tower' novels, turning this into an über-narrative that, he suggests, is the keystone to his other work."]

WEB- Copy editors are still arguing over whether *Web site* should be two words and initial-capped, but most agree that the combining form should be curbed, whether *webhead, webzine,* or *webonomics.*

Since 1990, the American Dialect Society (ADS) has been selecting annually the new words and phrases that best typify the year just passed. Based on its membership's nominations and votes, winners are selected and a "Word of the Year" is announced. In addition, it lists various categories of words and phrases, such as "the most useful," "the most creative," "the most euphemistic," "the most original," "the most outrageous," "the most likely to succeed," "the most unnecessary," and occasionally, "the best revival of an old term." The ADS emphasizes that its selections reflect the concerns and preoccupations of the year gone by, and that the words need not be new but they are usually newly prominent. (A list of the winners and losers can be found on the ADS Web site, *www.americandialect.org.*)

The Words of the Year so far have been:

1990 *bushlips* "insincere political rhetoric." Runners-up included *notebook PC* "a portable personal computer weighing 4–8 pounds," and *rightsizing* "adjusting the size of a staff by laying off employees." Most amazing: *bungee jumping* "jumping from a high platform with elastic cables on the feet."

1991 *mother of all* "greatest," as in *the mother of all bosses.* Most likely to succeed: *rollerblade* "skate with rollers in a single row." Most successful: *in your face* "aggressive, confrontational." Most original: *pharming* "genetically modifying farm animals to produce human proteins for pharmaceutical use."

1992 *Not!* "an expression of disagreement." Most likely to succeed: *snail mail* or *s-mail* "mail that is physically delivered, as opposed to e-mail." Most amazing: *Munchausen's syndrome by proxy* "illness fabricated to evoke sympathy for the caregiver." Most original: *Franken-* "genetically altered." Most outrageous: *ethnic cleansing* "purging of ethnic minorities."

1993 *information superhighway* "the large-scale communications network created by computers." Most amazing: *cybersex* "sexual stimulation through the computer." Most imaginative: *McJob* "a generic, unstimulating, low-paying job."

1994 a tie between the combining form *cyber-* and the verb *morph* "to change form." Most trendy: *dress down day* or *casual day* "a workday when employees are allowed to dress casually." Most euphemistic: *challenged* "indicating an undesirable or unappealing condition."

1995 *World Wide Web*, and its variants *Web, WWW, W3.* Most useful: *E.Q.* for "emotional quotient, or the ability to manage one's emotions, seen as a factor in achievement." Most original: *go postal* "act irrationally, often violently, from stress at work."

1996 *mom*, as in *soccer mom, minivan mom, waitress mom, single mom.* Most useful: *dot*, used instead of "period" in e-mail addresses. Most original: *prebuttal*, "preemptive rebuttal." Most controversial: *Ebonics* "African-American vernacular English" (blend of *ebony* and *phonics*).

1997 *millennium bug* "the bug predicted to affect detrimentally all computers at the start of the millennium," later called *Y2K.* Most likely to succeed: *DVD* "Digital Versatile Disk, optical disk expected to replace CDs." Most useful (tie): *-[r]azzi* "an aggressive pursuer" and the derisive interjection *duh* to express someone else's ignorance or stupidity.

1998 the ubiquitous e- prefix. Most euphemistic: *senior moment* "momentary lapse of memory due to age."

1999 *Y2K* (see *millennium bug*). Most useful: *dot-com* "a company operating on the Web." Most original: *cybersquat* "to register a Web address intending to sell it at a profit."

2000 *chad*, the notorious scrap of paper torn off a ballot that invalidated it and upset the presidential election. The word elbowed out *muggle*, the Harry Potter term for a nonwizard or any plain, unimaginative person. It also beat *civil union*, meaning a legal same-sex marriage. Most creative: *dot bomb* "a failed dot-com." Most euphemistic: *courtesy call* "an uninvited call from a telemarketer."

2001 *9-11* or *9/11* "the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001." Most useful (tie): *facial profiling* "using video 'faceprints' to identify terrorists and criminals," and *second-hand speech* "overheard cell-phone conversation in public places."

2002 *weapons of mass destruction* or *WMD*, sought for in Iraq. Most likely to succeed: *blog* "weblog, a Web site of personal events, comments, and links." Most useful: *google, v.* "to search the Web using the search engine Google."

2003 *metrosexual* "a fashion-conscious heterosexual male." Most useful: *flexitarian* "vegetarian who occasionally eats meat." Most creative: *freegan* "person who eats only free food" (patterned on *vegan*). Other candidates included *embed, v.* "to place journalists with troops or a political campaign," the virus *SARS* (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), the combining form *-shoring*, "indicating the location of jobs or businesses, for example, *offshoring*, moving them out of the country, *nearshoring*, moving them to Canada." *text, v.* "to send a text message," and *tanorexia*, "the condition of being addicted to tanning" (a play on *anorexia*).

2004 *red state* "a state whose residents favor conservative Republicans in the political map of the United States"; *blue state* "a state whose residents favor liberal Democrats; *purple state* "a state whose residents are undecided; a swing state." Most useful: *phish* "to induce someone to reveal private information by means of deceptive e-mail." Most unnecessary: *stalkette* "a female stalker." Most euphemistic: *badly sourced* "false." Other candidates included the euphemism *wardrobe malfunction* "unanticipated exposure of bodily parts" (referring to such an exposure on television) and *flip-flopper* "a political candidate who repeatedly reverses positions on important issues."

2005 The surprise Word of the Year was *truthiness* "the quality of stating concepts or facts one wishes or believes to be true, rather than known to be true." Runners-up were *podcast* "a digital feed containing audio or video files for downloading to a portable MP3 player" and *intelligent design* or *ID* "the theory that life could only have been created by a sentient being (promoted by proponents of creation science as a necessary part of school curricula alongside explanations of evolution)." Most creative: *muffin top* "the bulge of flesh hanging over the top of low-rider jeans." Most euphemistic: *holiday tree* "Christmas tree." Most likely to succeed: *sudoku* "a number puzzle in which numbers 1 through 9 must be placed into a grid of cells so that each row or column contains only one of each."

Back in 2000, the ADS not only named the Word of the Year but chose also the Word of the Decade, the Word of the Century, and the Word of the Millennium. The Word of the Decade was the *Web*, which beat among others the prefix *e-*, the combining form *Franken-*, *ethnic cleansing*, *senior moment*, and the slangy *way*, "very" (as in *way cool*). The Word of the Century was *jazz*, an interesting choice, considering that it outmatched such weighty terms as *DNA*, *media*, *melting pot*, *modern*, and *World War*, though it certainly deserved to rout the other, rather lightweight nominees, *cool*, *teenager*, *T-shirt*, and *teddy bear*. The Word of the Millen-

nium was the pronoun *she*, which did not exist before the year 1000 (it replaced *heo*, which was too often confused with *he*). A close runner-up was *science*.

VARIETIES OF NEOLOGISMS

As the ADS choices show, it's not easy to determine which new word or phrase will leave a permanent mark on the language. But once a word or phrase becomes part of everyday usage, it ceases to remain new for long. Call it an axiom: Most new words either disappear quickly or become old quickly. Though we may not be sure if a word is new (unless we study its history), we may be sure that it won't be new for very long. Internet terms that seemed novel just a few years ago—*browser, cookie, dot-com, e-mail, emoticon, home page, search engine, surfing the Net*—are surprisingly familiar and commonplace. So all we can say about neologisms is that most of them are created to express something new, are formed by various established processes of word formation, and can be categorized under certain names, such as:

abbreviations and acronyms. Examples: *CIO* (Chief Information Officer), *DVR* (Digital Video Recorder), *GMO* (Genetically Modified Organism), *SARS* (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome).

back-formations. Examples: *weaponize*, "to equip with weapons" (a back-formation from *weaponization*) and *Iraqify* "to make someone or something Iraqi" (a back-formation from *Iraqification*). A current example of a new back-formed word comes from Great Britain. It is *celeb*, a vogue verb derived from *celebrity*, meaning "to include celebrities at a social affair, especially to promote a cause," as in *The party was successfully celebed with show-biz personalities. Celebing for a fashionable cause can draw a big crowd.*

blends. Examples: *cinevangelism*, "the use of movies to spread evangelism," a Time magazine coinage (Aug. 16, 2004); *Juneteenth* (a blend of *June nineteenth*), "an African-American holiday celebrating the anniversary of the Emancipation"; *eatertainment*, "dining combined with entertainment"; *nutraceutical*, "food that is thought to provide health benefits," a blend of *nutr(ient)* and *(pharm)aceutical*.

borrowings. Examples: (from Brazilian Portuguese) *capoeira*, a popular martial art, exercise, and dance; (from Mexican Spanish) *chalupa*, a bowl-shaped tortilla dish filled with vegetables and cheese; (from the Persian word for wool) *pashmina*, a fine cashmere wool from the wild goat of the Himalayas; (from Japanese) *unami*, the rich, savory taste of many Asian foods, regarded as a basic flavor distinct from salty, sweet, sour, and bitter.

clippings. Examples: *brane*, from *membrane* (a four-dimensional space in string theory); *enviro* (an environmentalist); the slang term *props*, "praise, credit, respects" (a clipping of *propers*).

coinages. Examples: *blings*, "shiny jewelry"; *dubs*, "automobile wheels"; *mouse potato* "person who spends too much time on the computer" (patterned on *couch potato*); *decarcerate*, "to release from prison," as in *The goal is to decarcerate nonviolent drug offenders*; *DNA*, verb, "to check the DNA of (an accused person)," as in *I'm impressed that defendants in a criminal case are being DNA'd*; *counterfactuality*, "speculation about how

the past might have unfolded under different circumstances," and *counterfactual history,* "alternate history."

combining forms. Examples: *-ista,* as in *barista,* "a server or waiter at a bar," and *fashionista,* "a follower of fashions or one involved in the fashion industry"; *-erati,* as in *digerati,* "a devotee of digital computers"; *glitterati,* "ostentatiously wealthy people," and *soccerati,* "soccer stars and fans"; *-think,* as in *groupthink, newthink, sickthink.*

compounds. Examples: *eldercare,* "organized care of elderly people"; *spider hole,* "an underground hideout"; *backstory,* "historical background of a story"; *wakeboard,* "a short board on which a rider is towed across a motorboat's wake."

derivatives. Examples: *jiggy,* "exciting, stylish"; *spendy,* "given to spending, extravagant"; *volumize,* "to add volume to (one's hair, etc.)"; *letteracy,* "the use of initial capitals to indicate words, as C for *cancer,* L for *liberal* (often as C-*word,* L-*word,* etc.)"; *smoothie,* "a thick drink made of fruit puréed in a blender with yogurt, juice, and other ingredients."

euphemisms. Examples: *companion animal* (instead of *pet*), *guardian* (instead of *owner*), *abortion-rights advocate* (instead of *pro-choice* or *abortionist*), *abortion-rights opponent* (instead of *pro-life* or *anti-abortionist*), *nonbeliever* (instead of *atheist*).

Many more examples of neologisms are found in various chapters of this book, though by the time you read this they may no longer be considered new!

CHAPTER 27

nonce words:

words serving a need of the moment

Nonce words should not be confused with nonwords or nonsense words. A *nonword,* as defined in the *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* (1997), is "a meaningless word that is not recognized or accepted as legitimate." In *Garner's Modern American Usage* (2003), Bryan Garner lists a series of words that were labeled nonwords about a hundred years ago by the critic Richard Grant White, including words like *enthused, experimentalize, preventative, doubtlessly,* and *irregardless.* Whatever he may think of these words, Garner wouldn't label them *nonwords.* Nor would we. In fact, we think that there is no such thing as a nonword. As Gertrude Stein might have said, a word is a word is a word.

A *nonsense word* is, of course, a word. It may not have a precise meaning, or any meaning for that matter. It is coined to create a

particular effect, and if that effect works well, the nonsense word becomes a permanent fixture in the language, like *chortle* and *frabjous*. (See the chapter on **Nonsense Words**, for examples.)

ORIGINS OF NONCE WORDS

What, then, is a *nonce word*? In *The King's English* (3d ed., 1930), H. W. and F. G. Fowler describe it as follows:

> A 'nonce-word' (and the use might be extended to 'nonce-phrase' and 'nonce-sense'—the latter not necessarily, though it may be sometimes, equivalent to nonsense) is one that is constructed to serve a need of the moment. The writer is not seriously putting forward his word as one that is for the future to have an independent existence; he merely has a fancy to it for this once. The motive may be laziness, avoidance of the obvious, love of precision, or desire for a brevity or pregnancy that the language as at present constituted does not seem to him to admit of.

Among the examples the authors cite (and correct parenthetically) are *remindful* (mindful), *insuccess* (failure), *deplacement* (displacement), *correctitude* (correctness), *briskened* (quickened), and *unquiet* (unrest). The Fowlers admit that these may have been mere slips of the pen; but they chastise the writers for being careless, or, at worst, capricious in their use of words.

The word *nonce*, meaning "a particular purpose or occasion," is used especially in the phrase *for the nonce*. This phrase was an alteration of the Middle English phrase *for the nanes*, which was a misdivision of *for then anes*, "for the ones" (meaning the one time, occasion, etc.). In 1884, during the preparation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), the editor, James Murray, coined the term *nonce-word* to label words that appeared to have been used only once or "for the nonce." In addition to *nonce-word*, the *OED* introduced terms like *nonce-form*, *nonce-meaning*, and *nonce-use* to label lexical items that seemed to have occurred only once in its files.

NONCE-WORDS

The *OED* has over a thousand entries labeled *nonce-wd.* Here are some examples:

TOUCH-ME-NOT-ISHNESS (nonce-wd.). Cf. stand-off-ish. 1837 Dickens Pickw. [*The Pickwick Papers*] viii. There was a dignity in the air, a touch-me-not-ishness in the walk, a majesty in the eye of the spinster aunt.

TRICHOMANIAC (nonce-wd.) a hair fetishist. 1949 R. Graves Common Asphodel 303. From descriptions in his poems it is clear that the first thing that he [sc. Milton] saw in a woman was . . . her hair. He was, in fact, a trichomaniac.

TWI-THOUGHT (nonce-wd. after twilight). 1885 G. Meredith Diana xxiv. Diana saw herself through the haze she conjured up. 'Am I worse than other women?' was a piercing twi-thought.

Most nonce words are transparent, formed from established words, and their meanings grasped at a glance. Here are some examples (with the nonce words italicized):

"The beloved author had a stage presence that was *belovable*" (Daniel A. Rose, *The New York Observer*, Nov. 29, 2004)

"Beefy, brash, styled like a *gangstermobile*, it [a Chrysler 300C sedan] is resonating with urban hipsters" (Daren Fonda, *Time*, Aug. 16, 2004)

" '. . . it's difficult to establish a reputation.' Ah, the *R-word*. Call it rep, call it *cred*, call it whatever you want" (*ESPN*, July 18, 2004)

RECOGNIZING NONCE WORDS

It's not easy to recognize a nonce word and to brand it as such. Many words that appear to have been formed for the nonce turn out, upon further investigation, to have been used before. To take one example, in an essay (*New York Times Book Review*, Sept. 19, 2004), the novelist Philip Roth wrote this about his latest work, *The Plot against America*: "Orwell . . . imagined a dystopia, I imagined a uchronia." A survey of current dictionaries showed no entry for *uchronia*. What did Roth mean by that word? It *seemed* to be a nonce word, but the fact that it registered no meaning suggested that it was more likely a rare word, not picked up by lexicographers. An Internet search proved this to be true. *Uchronia* was coined circa 1991 as a short name for the "Usenet Alternate History List"—formed from *U*(senet) + *chron-* "time" + *(utop)ia*—and by 1997 it was used as a synonym for the terms *alternate history, allohistory,* and *counterfactual history,* all referring to novels, short stories, or other works that offer alternative versions of historical events. In Roth's novel, the *uchronia* he describes is one in which the pro-Nazi aviation ace Charles Lindbergh wins the 1940 presidential election instead of Franklin Roosevelt and decides to keep the United States out of World War II. The novel depicts the profound effect of this decision on the lives of American Jews, as typified by Roth's Newark family.

WHEN NONCE WORDS CATCH ON

As has happened a century ago with many so-called nonwords, coinages that appear to be nonce words sometimes catch on with the public and become fashionable. In a chapter entitled "Nonce Words" in his book *On Language* (1980), William Safire introduces the subject as "a guide to those currently 'in' phrases that make up our transient-talk," in effect equating many nonce words with "vogue words." Among the items on his list are: *biggie* (as in "Hollywood biggie"), *slimdown* looks, *glitch, -aholic, condomania* (in housing), *glitterati,* and *whatsisface*. These may have begun life as nonce words, but have grown into half- if not full-fledged members of the English lexicon.

Nonce words are often playful, humorous, or fanciful coinages, many of them puns. Some typical examples are *herstory* (a feminist play on *history*), *petishism* (a pun formed from *pet* and *fetishism*), *smotherlove* (a pun on *mother love*), and *yumptious* (a blend of *yummy* and *scrumptious*). In *What's the Good Word?* (1982), Safire enumerates some of his own coinages: "I have denounced trendy alienation as 'anomietooism,' warned of 'future schlock,' and, in a Schadenfreudian slip hailed 'urbane renewal.' " The piece, entitled "A Barrel of Puns," elicited a barrel of letters, one of which includes the following letter by Marie Borroff, of Yale University:

> I learned the term 'wideawake hat' from A. A. Milne's poem 'The Alchemist' (the alchemist is said to put on a big wide-awake hat at night and sit in his writing room, writing). I always thought it was a nonce word, a jocular opposite of 'nightcap.'

But then I came across it again in a British book and looked it up, and found . . . that a wideawake hat is a broad-brimmed felt hat, said to be so called because it has no nap.

Among the most prolific creators of nonce words are poets. Gerald Manley Hopkins's famous short poem "Pied Beauty" contains the nonce words *couple-color, rose-moles, fresh-firecoal, chestnut-falls,* and *fathers-forth.* In his poem "To Autumn," John Keats describes the season with such evocative nonce phrases as "bosom-friend of the maturing sun," "hair soft-lifted," "the soft-dying day," and "stubble plains." The Irish poet Seamus Heaney, winner of the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature, wrote a poem entitled "Nonce Words," whose last stanza reads:

And blessed myself
in the name of the nonce
and happenstance,
the *Who knows*
the *What nexts*
and *So be its.*

JOYCIAN NONCE

No writer in English has shown greater inventiveness in coining words for the nonce than another Irishman, James Joyce (1882–1941), the author of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake.* Most of Joyce's nonce words are designed to convey the stream of consciousness or interior monologue of his characters. Here are typical examples from *Ulysses,* from Chapter 8 of part 2: *hoofirons, steelringing, fifenote, longindying, clappyclap, fernfoils, bronzelydia,* and *oceangreen.* The meanings of these compounds can be understood with relative ease. But it is in *Finnegans Wake* that Joyce pulls out all stops. The work is so thick with invented words that it requires a skeleton key to decipher its contents, to say nothing of its plot, which is impenetrable and has been subjected to many questionable interpretations and theories. Chapter 1, which is comparatively straightforward, begins this way:

riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs. Sir Tristram, violer d'amores, fr'over the short sea, had passen-core rearrived from North Armorica on this side the scraggy isthmus of Europe Minor to wielderfight his penisolate war: nor had topsawyer's rock by the stream Oconee exaggerated themselse to Laurens County's gorgios while they went doublin their mumper all the time. . . .

It's safe to say that Joyce carried the idea of nonce formations to extremes. Another writer given to coining words, Anthony Burgess (see the chapter on **Coinages**) paid homage to Joyce by coining a verb from Joyce's book's title in this sentence from the novel *Inside Mr. Enderby* (1963): "The intermittent drone was finneganswaked by lightly sleeping Enderby into a parachronic lullaby chronicle." The verb *to finneganswake,* both allusive and suggestive, is a prime example of a nonce word.

SEPARATING NONCE FROM NEOLOGISM

Can we call a nonce word a neologism? Yes and no. Loosely, any nonce word *is* a new word, though coined for a particular occasion. *DNA* used as a verb, as in the sentence "The prisoners are

DNA'd these days," may have been used only once by a speaker or writer, but it is a genuine neologism. Another nonce coinage, *to catastrophize,* "to tend to look at things as catastrophes," can be easily viewed as a neologism. Strictly speaking, however, a neologism is a new word that has attained widespread use, even if for a relatively short time. A verb like *downhold,* as in the sentence "The administration has decided to downhold non-defense spending," becomes a neologism when it infiltrates bureaucratic jargon. *Frankenfood,* which appeared in the early1990s to describe in a pejorative way food that has been genetically modified, seemed at first to be a nonce word. But once it caught on, and even spawned a combining form, *Franken-* (as in *Frankenbean* and *Frankensalmon*), the word was categorized as a neologism and promptly entered in several dictionaries. What these examples show is that time has to pass before we can call a newly coined word either a nonce word or a neologism.

In his book *Words About Words* (1983), David Grambs defines *nonce word* as "A word devised for one occasion or publication and usually short-lived, as contrasted with a neologism; makeshift or convenient term, such as one invented by a novelist for a special usage or meaning."

What is the difference between a nonce word and a hapax legomenon? A hapax legomenon (from Greek, "once said") is a literary term for any word or phrase that occurs only once in a document, in the works of an author, or in the literature of a language. For example, Shakespeare used the word *birthplace* only once, in *Coriolanus,* who says "My birthplace hate I," referring to Rome, where he was born. In this play, then, as in all of Shakespeare's works, *birthplace* is a hapax legomenon. But it is the kind of word that Shakespeare might have used many times but, for whatever reason, did not. By contrast, a nonce word is one made up deliberately for a particular purpose or effect, and therefore

unlikely to appear again, as exemplified above in the poems of Hopkins and Keats.

Nonce words are common both in writing and speech, but they are noted chiefly in print, where they stand out, which, of course, is their purpose. Writers create such words to lend flavor and variety to a description, narrative, or commentary. For this reason alone they are worth noticing.

CHAPTER 28

nonsense words:

grammarithemetic and lots of things beside

If you think that nonsense words are too nonsensical to be considered words, think again. Nonsense words may be devoid of conventional meaning, but often, and especially when they are inspired inventions, they have a catchy, humorous, satirical, and endearing quality that makes them memorable and endows them with a sense that surpasses everyday meaning. It is to this quality that nonsense words owe their popularity. The most beloved children's verses, rhymes, and stories are known for the nonsense words, phrases, and sentences in them. And nonsense can be useful. Teachers use nonsense syllables (*glump, trib, donk*) to teach sound–spelling correspondence to young pupils. Cryptographers are known to send important coded messages by prefacing and closing crucial details with nonsense words.

Nonsense words have had a long history in English literature. Perhaps the most famous word regarded as nonsensical is *honorificabilitudinitatibus* in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. The word crops up in the play in this exchange between the page Moth and the clown Costard, as both slyly criticize the word-swallowing pedantry of Moth's master Don Armado and the schoolmaster Holofernes:

> MOTH [aside to Costard]: They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps.
>
> COSTARD: O, they have lived long on the alms-basket of words, I marvel thy master hath not eaten thee for a word; for thou art not so long by the head as honorificabilitudinitatibus: thou art easier swallowed than a flap-dragon.

This long word, considered the longest in English literature, has an interesting history. It is not only found in Shakespeare, but in the private notebooks of his contemporary, Sir Francis Bacon. Believers in the theory that Bacon wrote the plays ascribed to Shakespeare have for centuries claimed that this was a nonsense word written into the play by Bacon as an anagram revealing his authorship. The anagram is the Latin "hi ludi, F. Baconis nati, tuiti orbi," meaning "these plays, born of F. Bacon, are preserved for the world."

But, as the critic Amanda Mabillard comments, "While this is an interesting coincidence, one must be careful not to take the anagram too seriously. The word "honorificabilitudinitatibus" is not a nonsense word at all, but rather it is the dative singular conjugation of a real medieval Latin word. Dante actually used it more than once, as did other writers of the period. A translation of it would be "the state of being able to achieve honors."

FOREIGN OR NONSENSE?

As we can see from this, foreign words are easily thought of as nonsense. *Hocus-pocus,* the formula used in performing magic tricks, is one such word. It first appeared in the 1630s as a mock-Latin incantation used by conjurers. In a 1655 book, *A Candle in the Dark; or, a Treatise Concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft,* the author writes, "I will speak of one man . . . who called himself The Kings Majesties most excellent Hocus Pocus, and so was called, because at the playing of every Trick, he used to say, *Hocus Pocus, tontus talontus, vade celeriter jubeo. . . .*" A subsequent theory, that the term was a perversion of a phrase in the Latin communion service, *Hoc est corpus meum,* "This is my body," is accepted by some etymologists and doubted by others. The *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (C. T. Onions, ed.) derives *hocus-pocus* from the mock-Latin formula *hax pax max Deus adimax,* used by beggars and street performers in the 1500s. Pseudo-Latin words were the nonsense words of the Middle Ages.

In *Gulliver's Travels,* Jonathan Swift invented nonsense words liberally to add color to his stories. Parodying the oriental style found in travel books of his day, he writes in *A Voyage to Lilliput:* "Golbasto Momarem Evlame Gurdilo Shefin, Mully Ully, Gue, most mighty emperor of Lilliput, delight and terror of the universe, whose dominions extend five thousand *blustrugs* (about twelve miles in circumference) to the extremities of the globe; monarch of all monarchs. . . ." In *A Voyage to Brobdingnag,* he writes: "She gave me the name of *Grildrig.* . . . The word imports what the Latins call *nanunculus,* the Italians *homunceletino.* . . . I called her my *Glumdalclitch,* or little nurse."

BORDERLINE NONSENSE WORDS

A word bordering on nonsense, but saved from extinction by its appearance in the *Journal* of Sir Walter Scott, is *floccinaucinihilipilification,* which he uses in the sense of "a devaluation or belittling." His *Journal* note of March 18, 1829, reads: "They must be taken with an air of contempt, a floccinaucinihilipilification of all that can gratify the outward man." The word's unusual length has gained it entry in several dictionaries, as this one in the *Random House Compact Unabridged Dictionary* (1996):

floc.ci.nau.ci.ni.hil.i.pil.i.fi.ca.tion (flok'sə nô'sə ni'hil ə pil'ə fī kā'shən), *n. Rare.* the estimation of something as valueless (encountered mainly as an example of one of the longest words in the English language). [1735–45; < L *flocci* + *nauci* + *nihili* + *pili* all meaning "of little or no value, trifling" + -FICATION]

In *Poplollies and Bellibones: A Celebration of Lost Words* (1997), Susan Kelz Sperling writes that the term used by Scott was coined by linking the four words *flocci, nauci, nihili,* and *pili* appearing in an Eton grammar of Latin. In the Foreword to Sperling's book, the language writer Willard R. Espy comments: "We are well rid of *floccinaucinihilipilification,* 'the habit of belittling'. . . . Surely this monster can never have entered the vernacular—except perhaps as a joke, like *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,* popularized by Walt Disney in a motion picture a few years back." It would probably surprise Espy to learn that the above-mentioned Random House dictionary also includes the following entry:

su.per.cal.i.frag.i.lis.tic.ex.pi.al.i.do.cious (sōō'pər kal'ə fraj'ə lis'tik ek'spē al'i dō'shəs), *adj.* (used as a nonsense word by children to express approval.)

Nonsense words that have a suggestive sound, no matter how hard their spelling or pronunciation, tend to take on lives of their own. In his book, *Words* (1982), Paul Dickson tells the story of three nonsense food names created by the U.S. armed forces in surveys of food preference. The nonsense names *funistrada, buttered ermal,* and *braised trake* were listed, along with 375 real foods, as controls to determine whether those taking the poll were paying attention. In a 1974 survey, *funistrada* ranked above such foods as eggplant, instant coffee, apricot pie, canned lima beans, grilled bologna, and cranberry juice. Neither of the two other nonsense names ranked as high as *funistrada,* which suggests that the soldiers *were* paying attention, but there was something about *funistrada* that, like Pavlov's bells, made the GIs salivate.

NURSERY NONSENSE

The longest-lived nonsense words are found in nursery rhymes. All languages have such rhymes, most of them very old and anonymous. Like speakers of other languages, English speakers hear them as infants and never forget them. All they need to hear is the first line or title, and they remember the rest: *Hey Diddle Diddle, Hickory Dickory Dock, Pat-a-cake Pat-a-cake, Humpty Dumpty.* Nonsensical tongue twisters learned as children are equally memorable: *Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers; How much wood would a woodchuck chuck; She sells sea shells at the seashore.* Children's games and dances are also frequently accompanied by meaningless rhymes: *Eenie, meenie, miney, moe, catch a turtle by the toe; Ring-a-ring-a-roses, a pocket full of posies; All around the mulberry bush, the monkey chased the weasel.*

It's a short step from these traditional nonsense rhymes to the celebrated nonsense verses of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear,

and Dr. Seuss. Like the nursery rhymes, the nonsense verses composed by Carroll, Lear, and Dr. Seuss combine nonsense words with whimsical storytelling. The stories have readable spelling and punctuation, and the same sentence structure as regular stories, except that they are meaningless. Such stories must have inspired the American linguist Noam Chomsky, in his groundbreaking book *Syntactic Structures* (1957), to illustrate what he considered a grammatically well-formed sentence with this example:

> *colorless green ideas sleep furiously.

Chomsky's sentence is pure nonsense but entirely correct grammatically. So is this verse from Edward Lear's poem "The Youthful Cove":

> The first his parrient was, who taught
> The cove to read and ride,
> Latin, and Grammarithemetic,
> And lots of things beside.

Both examples are formed in grammatically correct English. But while every word in Chomsky's nonsense sentence is a real English word, Lear combines nonsense words like *parrient* and *Grammarithemetic* with real words. A similar distinction is made in the anthology *Poetry Out Loud* (1993). Comparing the poems of Lewis Carroll with those of the modern American poet e. e. cummings, the book's editor, Robert Alden Rubin, writes:

> A *nonsense verse* is like a child playing—there's usually some logic, but it doesn't follow 'grown-up' rules. Its inventions and unlikely combinations are its charm. Here [in the poem *Jabber-*

wocky], Lewis Carroll invents imaginary words, but the *sense* of English grammar is so strong he can tell a story anyway. E. E. Cummings, on the other hand, uses real words in seemingly ungrammatical and nonsensical ways. What makes Carroll's poem 'nonsense' is its lack of any serious message; Cummings's poem [*Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town*], for all its strangeness, has a point to make.

Lewis Carroll (1832–98), the pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, is best known for his *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1872), both of which have been translated into more than eighty languages and are among the most quoted works in English. The poem *Jabberwocky* appears in *Through the Looking Glass,* and though most of its words are nonsensical, Humpty Dumpty and Alice try to make sense of the first stanza:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogroves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"That's enough to begin with," Humpty Dumpty interrupted: "there are plenty of hard words there. 'Brillig' means four o'-clock in the afternoon—the time when you begin *broiling* things for dinner."
"That'll do very well," said Alice: "and '*slithy*'?"
"Well, '*slithy*' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed into one word."
"I see it now," Alice remarked thoughtfully: "and what are '*toves*'?"

"Well, '*toves*' are something like badgers—they're something like lizards—and they're something like corkscrews."
"They must be very curious-looking creatures."
"They are that," said Humpty Dumpty: "also they make their nests under sundials—also they live on cheese."
"And what's to '*gyre*' and to '*gymble*'?"
"To '*gyre*' is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To '*gimble*' is to make holes like a gimlet."
"And '*the wabe*' is the grass-plot round a sundial, I suppose?" said Alice, surprised at her own ingenuity.
"Of course it is. It's called '*wabe*,' you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it—"
"And a long way beyond it on each side," Alice added.
"Exactly so. Well then, '*mimsy*' is 'flimsy and miserable' (there's another portmanteau for you). And a '*borogrove*' is a thin shabby-looking bird with its feathers sticking out all round—something like a live mop."
"And then '*mome raths*'?" said Alice. "I'm afraid I'm giving you a great deal of trouble."
"Well, a '*rath*' is a sort of green pig: but '*mome*' I'm not certain about. I think it's short for 'from home'—meaning that they'd lost their way, you know."
"And what does '*outgrabe*' mean?"
"Well, '*outgribing*' is something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle: however, you'll hear it done, maybe—down in the wood yonder—and when you've once heard it, you'll be *quite* content. . . ."

The poem contains many other nonsense words that Humpty Dumpty doesn't explain. Among them are several that have become a part of standard literary English and have found their way into various dictionaries, including *jabberwocky,* "gibberish, nonsense" (from the poem's title, which refers to a men-

acing creature called a *Jabberwock*); *bandersnatch*, "an imaginary wild and fierce animal, or a person like it"; *galumph* "to march on exultantly with clumsy bounding movements" (a blend of *gallop* and *triumphant*); *frabjous* "wonderful, superb" (a blend of *fabulous* and *joyous*); and *chortle* "to chuckle with a snort" (a blend of *chuckle* and *snort*). Carroll was a master of what came to be known as *portmanteau words*. (See more in the chapter on **Blends.**)

The English writer and artist Edward Lear (1812–88) made a career out of nonsense. He wrote *The Book of Nonsense* (1846) for the grandchildren of his patron, the earl of Derby. The book consists entirely of limericks, five-line humorous verses. Lear called them "nonsense" (the name "limerick" had not yet become known) because his verses were nonsensical. His later books, *Nonsense Songs, Stories, and Botany* (1870), and *Queery Leary Nonsense* (published posthumously in 1911), included long poems such as the above-cited "The Youthful Cove." A typical piece from the later period is "The Dong with a Luminous Nose," which includes these lines:

The wandering Dong through the forest goes!
The Dong! the Dong!
The Dong with a luminous Nose!
Long years ago
The Dong was happy and gay,
Till he fell in love with the Jumbly Girl
Who came to those shores one day.
For the Jumblies came in a sieve, they did,
Landing at eve near the Zemmery Fidd
Where the Oblong Oysters grow. . .

Though there are fewer nonsense words in this poem than in "Jabberwocky," there are enough in it to give the same overall effect as Carroll's poem does. The Dong is a close kin to the Jabberwock.

The most famous nonsense writer of our times is unquestionably Dr. Seuss (1904–91), a writer of children's books whose full name was Theodor Seuss Geisel. He was a prodigious coiner of nonsense words and verses. Among the beloved creatures he invented are the Cat in the Hat, the Beagle-Beaked-Bald-Headed Grinch, the Lorax, Yertle the Turtle, Horton the Elephant, and hundreds of others, from the two Biffer-Baum Birds to the Zizzer-Zazzer-Zuzz.

In a typical Dr. Seuss book, *There's a Wocket in My Pocket* (1974), a little boy imagines strange creatures lurking everywhere in his house with names that rhyme with the names of the places they're found in. He imagines seeing a *woset* in his closet, a *nink* in the sink, a *yottle* in a bottle, a *nooth grush* on his tooth brush, a *zlock* behind the clock, and so on. Dr. Seuss accompanies the text with colorful drawings in which the nonsense names are matched up with an assortment of weird-looking creatures.

RELATIVE NONSENSE

The closest relatives to nonsense words in standard English are terms for confusing, unintelligible, or meaningless speech or writing, including:

BABBLE: Going back to the 1200s, this word was formed apparently in imitation of the repetitive sounds made by babies. It is similar to *blah-blah*, and related to Latin *babulus*, "one who babbles." The word is used especially to form compounds like *psychobabble, technobabble, Eurobabble*. The widely used and pejorative term *psychobabble* was coined by the writer Richard

Rosen, who defined it as a "monotonous patois" and "psychological patter." Cyra McFadden, who wrote the best-selling novel *The Serial* (1977), which satirizes California psychobabble, has said about it, "I define it as semantic spinach, and I say the hell with it."

BAFFLEGAB: This is a pejorative term for pretentious and confusing jargon, coined in the 1950s from "gab that baffles." It is often applied to the speeches of politicians.

BOSH: Another word for "nonsense," this came from a Turkish word meaning "empty," and was popularized by the novel *Ayesha*, by J. J. Morier, a 19th-century British writer of romance novels set in countries of Asia Minor.

GIBBERISH: A word known since the 1550s, it was apparently formed from *gibber-* (representing meaningless chatter and perhaps influenced by the earlier *jabber*) and the suffix *-ish*, found in language names like *English, Spanish, Turkish.*

GOBBLEDYGOOK: The word was coined in 1944 by a Texas Congressman, Maury Maverick, to describe the pretentious and confusing jargon of bureaucrats, which he compared to the gobble of turkey cocks. When asked how he got the word, he answered: "I do not know. It must have come in a vision. Perhaps I was thinking of the old bearded turkey gobbler back in Texas, who was always gobbledy gobbling and strutting with ludicrous pomposity. At the end of this gooble was a sort of gook."

MUMBO JUMBO: This term for unintelligible, complicated, and confusing language was apparently formed in imitation of such language and was probably an alteration of *mumble-jumble*. Reduplications like this are fairly

common in English: *hanky-panky, hunky-dory, walkie-talkie*. Nevertheless, some etymologists have connected *mumbo jumbo* with an African (Mandingo) name of a god, *mama dyumbo*, based on a 1738 description of a fearsome bugbear called "Mumbo-Jumbo" among African tribes. How this African name came to be used for unintelligible, confusing language has not been explained, and makes one think that this is an instance of etymological mumbo jumbo. (See also the chapter on **Reduplication.**)

We cannot in all conscience conclude this chapter without mentioning one of the commonest kinds of nonsense words concocted in English: the hybrid nonce word/nonsense word most of us seize upon when we can't for the life of us remember a word or name that's on the tip of our tongue. The most common ones are *watchamacallit, whatsitsname, whatsitsface, whoozis,* and *whoozit.* But in case you've forgotten, here is a partial list of some of the others you may have used on occasion:

dingbat, dingus

doodad, doodinkus

doohickey, doojiggers, doowhistle

gilguy, gilhoolie, gizwatch

howyacallit, hoosiedingy, hootis, hootmalalie

jigamajig, jigamaree, jigumbob

thingamabob, thingummy, thingy

whodingy, wimwom, wingdoodle

And let's also remember the high numbers: *eleventeen, xteen, gazillion, jillion, umpty-umpth,* and *zazillion.* The highest number is, of course, a *googol,* which, despite its funny look, represents a real number, no nonsense about it.

CHAPTER 29

onomatopoeia:

from buzzing bees to tintinnabulating bells

One of the great questions of all time is how spoken language got started. No one knows the answer, but that hasn't stopped linguists from conjecturing. Among the theories compiled for the origin of language by Danish linguist Otto Jespersen, perhaps the most famous one is the *bow-wow theory,* which holds that language began in imitations of the sounds emitted by animals—sounds like the *bow-wow* of dogs, the *meow* of cats, the *quack-quack* of ducks, the *moo* of cows, the *oink* of pigs, the *hiss* of snakes, and so on. Not coincidentally, these are some of the first sounds learned by children from songs like *Old MacDonald Had a Farm* and *Baa Baa Black Sheep.*

Another thesis is the *ding-dong theory,* according to which language began when people named things after a sound associated with them, such as the *ding* of a bell, the *crash* of thunder, the

splash of water. A third is the *pooh-pooh theory*, which maintains that speech arose from involuntary exclamations made in pain, disgust, fear, anger, repulsion, and the like, as *ow, ouch, aah, ugh, grr,* or *phew.* Then there is the *yo-he-ho theory*, proposing that speech arose from the rhythmic grunts and other sounds made by people working together, as in pulling, lifting, digging, and so forth.

All of these theories are based on the idea that language began with some kind of imitation of sounds, which is what *onomatopoeia* is about. This rhetorical term may be great for spelling bees but it's something of a misnomer. Though defined as "the imitation of sounds," the term came through Latin from a Greek word meaning "the making of names" (from *onóma,* "name" + *poieîn,* "to make"), which hasn't much to do with either sounds or their imitation. A more accurate term for an imitative word is *echoism* (coined by the great lexicographer Sir James Murray), since such a word literally echoes a sound. But after hundreds of years in circulation, *onomatopoeia* is the term you will find in most books.

The language-origin theories based on onomatopoeia are generally discounted for at least two reasons. First, because imitative words are in most languages relatively few, and none of the theories can adequately account for the thousands upon thousands of words that have nothing to do with sounds, words like *earth, sun, moon, sky, star,* and *tree.* Second, imitative words differ from one language to another. The bark of an English or American dog may sound like *bow-wow,* but a French dog says *gnaf-gnaf,* a Russian dog *tyaff-tyaff,* a Chinese dog *wu-wu,* a Japanese *wan-wan,* and an Israeli *hav-hav.* This is true of most other words imitative of sounds, like the *tick-tock* of a clock or the *clang-clang* of a trolley. And let's not forget that, in English, dogs sound sometimes like *arf-arf* or *woof-woof* or *ruff-ruff* besides

bow-wow. In other words, even though animal species and falling, running, hitting, and jumping objects everywhere make the same sounds, their human imitators merely mimic the sounds but cannot reproduce them.

WHAT ARE ONOMATOPOEIC WORDS?

Onomatopoeic, echoic, or imitative words, then, are those that attempt to reproduce or suggest the myriad sounds made by animals or people, or found in nature and the environment. There are no rules governing the formation of such words. All that is necessary is that the imitative word resembles or suggests the sound. A number of conventional sound words have developed this way. They include:

1. Exclamations or Interjections

ah!—of surprise, joy, etc.

aha!—of triumph, surprise, etc.

ahchoo!—of sneezing

ahem!—throaty sound to attract attention

bah!—of contempt

boo—of disapproval or derision

er—of hesitation

fie—of disgust

hah?—of suspicion, interrogation, etc.

ha-ha!—of laughter

ho-hum—of boredom

huh?–of disbelief, confusion, etc.

humph!–of disbelief

oh!–of surprise, sympathy, etc.

ouch!–of sudden pain

phew!–of disgust or exhaustion

pshaw!–of impatience or contempt

psst–unobtrusive sound to call someone's attention

sh or *shh*–of shushing

tehee–of snickering laughter

tsk-tsk–of pity or commiseration

tut-tut–of disapproval or disdain

ugh!–of aversion or horror

uh-huh–of agreement

uh-oh!–of concern or chagrin

uh-uh–of disapproval

2. Speech Sounds

babble–speak meaninglessly

blab–talk too much

blah–meaningless chatter

blah-blah-blah–continuous meaningless chatter

chatter–talk rapidly or pointlessly

gab–chat idly

hallo or *hello!*–call or answer someone

hey!–call attention; express surprise

hi–greeting

ho!–call to attract attention

holler–yell

hush!–urge to be quiet

jabber–chatter

murmur–low, indistinct speech

mutter–speak in a murmur

natter–talk on and on

prattle–chatter or babble

shush!–urge to be quiet

squeal–a sharp, shrill cry

stutter–speak spasmodically

susurrate–whisper

tattle–talk idly

whimper–speak low

whine–make a low, complaining sound

yada-yada-yada–continuous meaningless or predictable chatter

yap–talk snappishly

3. Animal Sounds

baa—of a sheep

bow-wow—of a dog

buzz—of a bee

caw—of a crow

chirp—of a bird

chirr—of a grasshopper

chirrup—of a bird

cluck—of a hen

cock-a-doodle-doo—of a rooster

coo—of a dove or pigeon

gobble—of a turkey

he-haw—of a donkey

hiss—of a snake

honk—of a goose

hoot—of an owl

meow—of a cat

moo—of a cow

neigh—of a horse

oink—of a pig

peep—of a small bird

purr—of a cat

quack—of a duck

tweet—of a small bird

whinny—of a horse

woof—of a dog

4. Sound Words

bawl	*fizz*	*rattle*	*wheeze*
belch	*flick*	*sizzle*	*whiz*
bump	*flutter*	*splatter*	*whoop*
burp	*hiss*	*squawk*	*whoosh*
chuff	*huff*	*squeal*	*whump*
chug	*hush*	*squish*	*wow*
crackle	*gargle*	*thud*	*yahoo*
crash	*gurgle*	*thump*	*yawp*
crinkle	*guzzle*	*thwack*	*yikes*
croak	*jangle*	*titter*	*yip*
croon	*jingle*	*twitter*	*yoo-hoo*
crush	*patter*	*ululate*	*zap*
drone	*putter*	*whack*	*zing*

5. Sound Effects

bang	*boing*	*boom*	*click*	*clip-clop*
beep	*boo-hoo*	*clang*	*clink*	*clunk*

ding-a-ling	*gop*	*ploosh*	*swish*	*wham*
ding-dong	*grr*	*pow*	*thwang*	*whoom*
eek	*kerplunk*	*rat-tat-tat*	*tweep*	*yoop*
glub	*oof*	*screech*	*va-va-voom*	*youch*
glug	*oops*	*sploosh*	*vroom*	*zoom*

The five lists above cover the major groups of imitative words in English. The lists are not exhaustive by any means, merely representative. Not included in the list of "Sound Words," for example, is the name of the game *tic-tac-toe*, formed in imitation of the sound made by a pen or pencil brought down on a slate while playing the game. Also omitted are words that describe animal sounds, such as *bark, bleat, bray, caterwaul, mewl,* or the names of birds formed in imitation of their call, such as the *cuckoo* and the *whippoorwill*. The list of examples under "Sound Effects" can be vastly expanded because words like these are formed arbitrarily in action cartoons and comic strips.

Closely related to imitative words are *phonesthemic* words, which are two or more words that share a speech sound and are associated with certain meanings. This phenomenon is called *phonesthesia* (from Greek *phōné*, "sound" + *aísthēsis*, "perception") or *sound symbolism*, and the speech sounds are known as *phonesthemes*. The phonestheme *gl-*, for example, is associated with the meaning "light" or "shining" in such words as *glare, gleam, glimmer, glint, glisten, gloss, glow, glower*; the cluster *fl-* is associated with "moving light" in words like *flame, flare, flash, flicker, flimmer*, and with "quick motion" in words like *flee, flip, flit, flop, flow, flurry, flutter, fly*; the cluster *-ash* suggests "violent motion" in words like *bash, clash, crash, dash, gnash, mash, slash, splash*; and the cluster *-ump* suggests a clumsy action or thing, as in *bump, dump, hump, lump, rump, slump, stump, thump*.

Phonesthemes are not necessarily clusters; they can be single sounds, like the vowel *-i-*, which suggests smallness or slightness, as in *bit, imp, kid, little, slim, slip, thin*; or the initial consonant *j-*, suggesting up-and-down motion, as in *jig, jingle, jog, jounce, juggle, jump*; or final *-p, -t, -k*, suggesting a sudden stop, in words like *clip, crack, hack, pat, rap, snip*.

An oft-noted characteristic of echoic words is their tendency to take an iterative or frequentative form, as in *itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny, truly-uly*. These iteratives take on various forms:

(1) They repeat exactly a base form, e.g., *gobble-gobble, tweet-tweet, woof-woof;*

(2) They alter the repeated form, e.g., *bow-wow, pitter-patter, tick-tock, zigzag;*

(3) The repeated form serves as an intensifier (mostly in slang words), e.g., *jeepers-creepers, okey-dokey, teeny-weeny, tip-top;*

(4) The iterative word is an alteration of a standard phrase, e.g., *itty-bitty* (alteration of *little bit*, further altered to *itsy-bitsy*), *hokey-pokey* (alteration of *hocus-pocus*).

Poetry makes much use of onomatopoeia. Here are three excerpts from poems by Shakespeare, Rudyard Kipling, and Edgar Allan Poe:

When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tu-whit, tu-who! a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.
(William Shakespeare, "Winter")

We're poor little lambs who've lost our way,
Baa! Baa! Baa!
We're little black sheep who've gone astray,
Baa–aa–aa!
(Rudyard Kipling, "Gentlemen-Rankers")

Keeping time, time, time
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells
Bells, bells, bells—
From the jingling and the tingling of the bells.
(Edgar Allan Poe, "The Bells")

CHAPTER 30

phrasal verbs:

getting by, down, in, off, on, over, and out

The expression most closely associated with the psychedelic era of the 1960s is "turn on, tune in, drop out." The coiner of this expression was Dr. Timothy Leary, a clinical psychologist at Harvard University, famous for his advocacy of the use of the hallucinogenic drug LSD. Leary was fired from Harvard in 1963 for experimenting with LSD and other drugs. When the communications expert Marshall McLuhan advised him to make up a "snappy" slogan to promote the use of LSD, Leary came up with "turn on, tune in, drop out," which became the clarion call of the generation of hippie acid-droppers whom he chiefly influenced. In 1965, he published a book titled *Turn on, Tune in, Drop out,* which is still in print.

Turn on, tune in, drop out are phrasal verbs. Such verbs owe their

"snappy" quality to the natural speech rhythm of the English language. In *A Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage* (1957), Bergen and Cornelia Evans say about such verbs: "They are simple and forceful and are generally preferred to their Latin equivalents. So *give up* is often preferred to *relinquish; give in* to *acquiesce; call out* to *evoke; take up* to *assume; bring in* to *introduce*."

Garner's Modern American Usage (2003) shows phrasal verbs in some typical contexts:

> . . . politicians *put up with* the press, and vice versa; striking workers *hold out* for more benefits; arguing family members *work out* their problems; campers must *make do* with the supplies they have; legacies are *handed down* from one generation to the next; gardeners work to *get rid* of weeds; overworked employees, like candles left too long, *burn out*. . . .

Phrasal verbs, sometimes also called *compound verbs* or *verb phrases*, have an informal feel that fits the style of humor writers and hard-boiled novelists. James M. Cain's classic novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, begins this way:

> They threw me off the hay truck about noon. I had swung on the night before, down at the border, and as soon as I got up there under the canvas, I went to sleep. I needed plenty of that, . . . and I was still getting it when they pulled off to one side to let the engine cool.

This simple narrative by Cain's fictional drifter and ex-con is built on a string of phrasal verbs: *threw off, swung on, got up, pulled off*. Later in the novel, there are sentences like this: "I ran back, picked her up, and slid down the ravine," where every action is described by a phrasal verb.

GETTING UP AND OTHER PHRASAL VERBS

Consider the phrasal verb *get up*, which has several meanings, including: "to rise from a sitting position"; "to rise from bed"; "to go up or ascend"; "to rouse, as one's courage"; "to prepare or arrange, as an exhibit." In a humorous essay, "Advice to Youth," written in 1882, Mark Twain built an entire paragraph on one of these meanings:

> Go to bed early, get up early—this is wise. Some authorities say get up with the sun; some others say get up with one thing, some with another. But a lark is really the best thing to get up with. It gives you a splendid reputation with everybody to know that you get up with the lark; and if you get the right kind of a lark, and work at him right, you can easily train him to get up at half past nine, every time—it is no trick at all.

As the examples show, a phrasal verb is a verb that consists of more than one word (usually a verb and an adverbial particle), such as *add up, break down, come on, dress up*. Ask any foreign student of English which is the biggest problem in learning the language, and he or she will tell you, mastery of phrasal verbs. There seems to be no logic involved in their forms and meanings, and using or understanding them can be difficult and confusing. Teachers of ESL (English as a Second Language) urge students to simply memorize the most common phrasal verbs, often providing them with lists of the verbs to be learned by heart. To create some order among the phrasal verbs, teachers often break up the list into the following four categories:

Transitive: A phrasal verb that is followed by an object, e.g., *pass up (an opportunity), try on (a garment), break into (a conversation), make up (a story).*

Intransitive: A phrasal verb that is not followed by an object, e.g., *blow over (The scandal blew over); show up (The guests finally showed up); die away (The noise died away).*

Separable: A transitive phrasal verb in which the object can come between the verb and the particle, e.g., *calm down (Calm down the child; Calm the child down); give back (He gave back the money; He gave the money back).*

Nonseparable: A transitive phrasal verb in which the particle can't be separated from the verb, e.g., *look after* (= "take care of"), as in *Please look after the children* (Incorrect: *Please look the children after); run against,* as in *She is running against the Mayor in the election* (Incorrect: *She is running the mayor against in the election).*

There is nothing in the forms of the phrasal verbs that would indicate whether they are transitive or intransitive, separable or nonseparable. Here, too, foreign students have no recourse but to memorize the use and meanings of these verbs.

This brings up the problem of meaning. Many phrasal verbs have more than one meaning (sometimes as many as five) and the meanings can be both literal and figurative. For example:

check out. (literal) *I checked out of the hotel* (= I left the hotel). (figurative) *Check out the bank before you open an account* (= investigate the bank).

come across. (literal) *I came across an old friend at the store* (= I met by chance). (figurative) *She comes across as very shy* (= She gives the impression of being very shy).

hold up. (literal) *The traffic jam held us up* (= The traffic jam delayed us). (figurative) *He was held up at gunpoint* (= He was robbed at gunpoint).

let down. (literal) *She let down the hem of the skirt* (= She lowered the hem). (figurative) *They let us down by not helping out* (= They disappointed us by not helping out).

make out. (literal) *I made out a check for $50* (= I wrote out a check for $50). (figurative) *How's he making out in business* (= How's he succeeding in business?).

put off. (literal) *We put off the wedding till May* (= We postponed the wedding). (figurative) *They were put off by his coldness* (= They were perturbed by his coldness).

Garner's Modern American Usage warns users to watch out for three pitfalls when using phrasal verbs: (1) Be sure to include the entire phrase, not just the verb. For example, use *cut down on* instead of *cut down* (expenses), *make up for* instead of *make up* (a loss); (2) Avoid a phrasal verb in which the adverbial particle is not essential but merely a useless appendage. Avoid, for example, phrases like *measure off* or *out, select out, divide up, separate off* or *out,* where the verbs *measure, select, divide, separate* will do by themselves; (3) Even though noun compounds derived from phrasal verbs are written solid or hyphenated, the corresponding verb forms should be written open, as two separate words. Thus, *breakdown (n.)* but *break down (v.); follow-up (n.)* but *follow up (v.); dropout (n.)* but *drop out (v.).*

The formation of compound nouns from phrasal verbs is well established in English, as in the following examples:

phrasal verbs	***compound nouns***
black out	blackout
break away	breakaway

break down	breakdown
break in	break-in
break out	breakout
break up	breakup
build up	buildup
drive in	drive-in
drive through	drive-through
fall back	fallback
get away	getaway
get together	get-together
go ahead	go-ahead
go between	go-between

Another type of formation is one in which the phrasal verb is inverted to form the compound noun, as in the following:

phrasal verbs	***compound nouns***
break out	outbreak
burst out	outburst
flow out	outflow
keep up	upkeep
lay out	outlay
put out	output

rush on	onrush
spill over	overspill
take up	uptake
throw over	overthrow

THE LOWDOWN ON DOWNPLAY

Some noun compounds formed by inversion, like *outlay* and *output*, are also used as verbs, but such uses are restricted to technical contexts, so they go mostly unnoticed. Adjective compounds formed by inversion, such as *upcoming* ("the upcoming election") and *ongoing* ("an ongoing conflict") are more conspicuous and therefore sometimes disparaged as "journalistic." A controversial case of an inverted phrasal verb is that of *downplay*. The standard verb is *play down*, but some time in the 1950s journalists began using *downplay* as a verb, as in *He tried to downplay his part in the controversy*. Despite being disparaged as "journalese" by some critics, the word has since come into general use. William Safire used it in a column in the early 1980s, but in a later column he changed his mind and explained why:

Downplay is telegraphese, like *downhold* (U.P.I. editors used to end messages to foreign correspondents with the not-so-cheery "Downhold expenses"). The word is elbowing its way into dictionaries, but the inversion of two words into a single-word substitute is offputting. *Play down* is a clear compound verb, offering a contrast to *play up*. To *play down* is to de-emphasize, min-

imize, and break a press agent's heart. We don't say *upplay*, why say *downplay*? Why not leave well enough alone and play down the controversy? *Downplay* is inelegant, trendy, and puts me off. I promise henceforth to play down stories (but not to hold down expenses) and never to use *downplay* again.

And, as far as we can tell, he has kept his word.

Many phrasal verbs function like idioms, i.e., like fixed phrases whose meaning differs from the individual meanings of its words. Such verbs have usually one or more figurative meanings and are used informally. The verb *get* has generated many phrases of this kind, including:

get around "circumvent or outwit (a rule, an order, etc.)"

get away with "go unpunished for (a crime, etc.)"

get by "manage with minimal effort"

get down to "attend to (business)"

get in with "enter into close association with"

get off "finish (the workday)"

get on "advance (in years)"

get out of "avoid doing (something)"

get over "recover from (an illness, etc.)"

get through "finish"

get to "contact"

get up "arise or ascend"

Compare these phrasal verbs with established idioms, such as the following:

get a kick out of "find (something) amusing"

get it "understand something," as in *I don't get it.*

get lost "go away," as in *I wish that bore would get lost.*

get nowhere "fail despite trying hard"

get on one's nerves "irritate or upset (someone)"

get real "be serious or realistic"

get there "reach one's goal"

Similar comparisons can be made with many phrasal verbs and idioms that begin with a verb, for example, *be, bring, carry, cut, do, go, have, hold, keep, make, pass, put, run, set, take.*

Native English speakers absorb such usages with their mother's milk. Foreign learners of English, however, must learn them by rote, unless they are lazy enough or patient enough to wait until they assimilate them through practice.

Dr. Timothy Leary's bizarre ideas have been long ago discredited, but there's no denying that he had a knack for expressing himself simply, in short, snappy phrases, a knack that attracted many followers in his day. Here's an excerpt from a talk he delivered impromptu at a gathering of his fans (source: *rotten.com*):

Six words: drop out, turn on, then come back and tune it in . . . and then drop out again, and turn on, and back in . . . it's all a rhythm . . . it's all a beat. You turn on, you find it inside, and then you have to come back (since you can't stay high all the

time) and you have to build a better model. But don't get caught—don't get hooked—don't get attracted by the thing you're building, cause . . . you gotta drop out again. It's a cycle. Turn on, tune in, drop out. Keep it going, keep it going . . . gotta keep it flowing, keep it flowing . . .

CHAPTER 31

prefixes and suffixes:

how to create a new word in one easy step

There is no easier way to create a new word than to attach a prefix or suffix to an established and familiar word. Thousands of words have been coined in English by this one-step method. Suppose you want to coin a word that means "rip beforehand." Take the prefix *pre-*, which means "before," and attach it to the verb *rip*, and voilà! you've coined the word *prerip* (as in *Wanting to look cool, he pre*ripped *his new denims*). All right, so it's not the greatest coinage; but a coinage it is. Its chances of getting into a dictionary are practically nil, since words coined by adding prefixes or suffixes to existing words are what lexicographers call "self-explanatory," and therefore not grist for the dictionary mill.

Yet words made up by using prefixes and suffixes have the great advantage of being easily accepted as valid words. As far as we know, nobody has ever objected to words like *preadmission,*

preapprove, precool, precut, preplan, prequalify, and hundreds like them. In 1996, Vice-President Al Gore was credited with coining the word *prebuttal* for a rebuttal to a speech issued before even the speech was given. To no one's surprise, the word resurfaced during the 2004 presidential campaign debate to describe a pre-debate rebuttal. No one has objected either to the universal displacement of the venerable term "used car" by the upstart "pre-owned car." Nor was there an outcry in the early 1970s against the bizarre coinage *prequel* for a sequel dealing with events preceding a previous work (though one solitary Canadian critic wrote that "the coining of such words should be punishable by a slow and ugly death"). Similarly, no protests have been issued against words formed ad hoc with the prefix *post-*, meaning "after," such as *postbudget, post-Freudian, postprimary, postrace, postseason,* and the like.

Compare the facility with which prefixes and suffixes slip into the language, without fuss or muss, to the protests that have met the overuse of new combining forms like *e-, i-, cyber-, techno-,* and *info-*. For instance, in their book *Wired Style* (1999), the writers Constance Hale and Jessie Scanlon lash out against the proliferation of the combining form *cyber-*, calling it "terminally overused." (See the chapter on **Combining Forms.**) Combining forms come in spates, calling attention to themselves, and irritating readers often enough to be discarded. This was the fate of the combining form *-gate,* which practically vanished once the Watergate scandals of the 1970s faded from memory. Combining forms are intrusive strangers we tolerate for a while; prefixes and suffixes are familiar figures we take for granted.

A prefix (from Latin *praefixus,* "fastened in front") is a meaningful element attached to the beginning of a word in order to form a new word. A suffix (from Latin *suffixus,* "fastened up") is such an element attached to the end of a word.

PREFIXES

Prefixes, which are far fewer in English than suffixes, are added mostly to verbs, as *un-* is added to the verb *do* to form *undo.* Other examples are *dis-* in *disrobe, mis-* in *mistreat, pre-* in *predetermine,* and *re-* in *rediscover.* The same prefixes can be used with adjectives (*uncertain, disorderly, misbegotten, prefabricated, repaid*) and nouns (*unperson, discomfort, mistrust, preexistence, remarriage*). But not all prefixes are equally productive. The prefix *a-*, meaning "not," derived from Greek, has produced only a few new words, among them *ahistorical, amoral,* and *apolitical.* Similarly, the prefix *ab-*, meaning "off, away from," which came into English as a component of words taken from French or Latin like *abhor* and *abjure,* has yielded less than a handful of new words, among them *aboral,* "away from the mouth," and *abnormal,* "away from the normal."

Some of the commonest of our prefixes, such as *un-, over-,* and *under-*, originated in Old English (before 1100). When *un-* is added to a verb, it means to do the opposite or reverse of the verb, as in *uncover, undress, unfasten, unfold, unload, untie.* But when it is added to an adjective or noun, it means "not," and is a synonym of another negative prefix, *in-*, which came into English from Latin. The two prefixes, *un-* and *in-*, have created considerable confusion since it is often unclear which word takes *un-* and which *in-*. As a general rule, if the adjective or noun came from Old English, the prefix is *un-*; if it came from Latin, the prefix is *in-*. Unfortunately, this rule has exceptions, found in such pairs as *unequal* and *inequality, undigested* and *indigestible* (both *equal* and *digest* are from Latin). The problem is compounded by the fact that a number of adjectives sometimes occur with both prefixes, and their use is often in dispute. Is it *indecipherable* or *undecipherable? insubstantial or unsubstantial? inelastic* or *unelastic? inexperi-*

enced or *unexperienced*? (The answer is: either *insubstantial* or *unsubstantial* is acceptable, but the rest take only *in-* .) If you are in doubt, your safest course is to consult a dictionary.

Another cause of confusion is that not all words prefixed by *in-* have negative meanings. For example, the word *invaluable* doesn't mean "not valuable" but rather "highly valuable; priceless" but the ambiguity in meaning often leads people to drop the prefix and use *valuable*, which of course is not the same as *invaluable*. To say that something is without value, one has to say that it is *valueless* or *worthless*, but a good synonym for *invaluable* is *priceless*. A similar situation came about, with far-reaching consequences, when the word *inflammable*, meaning "easily set on fire," was thought to be easily mistaken for its opposite, namely, "not easily set on fire." Fire departments and insurance companies, committed to safety, agreed to drop the *in-* prefix and change the word to *flammable*. The change was deplored in critical circles, where the loss of *inflammable* to *flammable* was viewed as corrupting the language. Though both words are still used, this is what *The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage* (1994) recommends: "Some people may . . . believe that *inflammable* means 'not flammable.' The coinage *flammable* has been used by some manufacturers as a way to show the meaning more clearly, but *flammable* is a safe choice." As for the opposite of *flammable*, a new word was coined with the indisputably negative prefix *non-*: *nonflammable*.

The negative prefix *in-* is also found in the variant forms *il-*, *im-*, and *ir-*, as in *illegitimate*, *impossible*, and *irrational*. The American dialectal word *irregardless*, meaning "without regard, irrespective," has been condemned by critics since the 1920s. Wilson Follett called it a barbarism, and Porter Perrin described it as "a careless duplication of meaning (negative prefix *ir-* and negative suffix *-less*); not used in reputable writing and better avoided in

speech." Even though *Webster's Third* labeled the word "nonstandard," in 1961 the editors of *Life* magazine angrily denounced the inclusion in the dictionary of this "most monstrous of non-words." *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989), after showing its widespread use, especially in common speech, admits that "*irregardless* is still a long way from winning general acceptance as a standard English word. Use *regardless* instead."

Currently, the most common negative prefix is *non-*, generally considered more neutral than *un-*. Manser and McQuain, in their *Guide to Good Word Usage* (1989), give the examples *a nonprofessional golfer* and *non-Christian religions*, noting that "The prefix *un-*, attached to the same words, may have stronger negative force: an *unprofessional* or *un-Christian* act, for example, violates professional ethics or Christian principles." Since the 1960s, English has been deluged with nouns and adjectives prefixed by *non-*. The prefix is used in two senses:

1. (forming nouns and adjectives) "Not; opposite or reverse of," as in *nonblack*, *nonwhite*, *nonachiever*, *noncandidate*, *noncommitted* nations, *nondegradable* waste materials, *nonpolluting* means of transportation, *nonaddictive* drug, *noninvasive* medical procedures, *nonprint* media, *nonprofit* organization.

2. (forming only nouns) "Not real or true; sham," as in *nonbook*, *noncountry*, *nonevent*, *nonissue*, *noninformation*, *nonplay*, *non-thing*.

THE OVERUSE OF *NON-*

Criticism of the overuse of *non-* has not been wanting, especially of its frequent use to coin unnecessary antonyms,

such as *nonoffensive* (for *defensive*), *nonpermanent* (for *temporary*), *nonnuclear* (for *conventional*), *nonsuccess* (for *failure*). Wilson Follett, in his *Modern American Usage* (1966), criticized

the increasing desire to classify everything into two groups like a digital computer; e.g. *fiction* and *nonfiction, alcoholic* and *nonalcoholic, age-determined unemployment* and *non-age-determined unemployment.* This tendency is to be deplored, both because of the ugly, unarticulated compounds it produces, and because the twofold division with *non-* is likely to suggest a strictness that it does not always possess.

The misuse of *non-* is perhaps most succinctly illustrated by the following exchange between Napoleon and Talleyrand, reported by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Napoleon: What is all this about non-intervention?

Talleyrand: Sire, it means about the same as intervention.

Prefixes are either productive or unproductive. (Note: We did not say "nonproductive.") Productive prefixes are those that form new words, while unproductive ones exist only as fossils in established words. *Un-* and *non-* are productive prefixes. Other common productive prefixes are:

counter- (meaning "offsetting, opposing," and added to nouns and verbs), as in *counterattack, counterbid, counterculture, counterdemonstration*

de- (meaning "undo the action of," and added to verbs), as in *deactivate, declassify, decontaminate, de-escalate, demilitarize, demonetarize, demythify*

dis- (meaning "do or be the opposite of," and added to verbs, nouns, and adjectives), as in *discredit, dishearten, disinherit; disbelief, discourtesy, disinfectant; disinterested, disorderly, dispassionate*

inter- (meaning "between, among," and added to adjectives, nouns, and verbs), as in *intercontinental, international, interpersonal; intermarriage, intersession, interstate; interact, interbreed, interweave*

mis- (meaning "wrong, wrongly," and added to verbs and nouns), as in *misaddress, misappropriate, misbehave, misguide, misjudge; misconduct, misdeed*

out- (meaning "out, away, beyond," and added to verbs, nouns, and adjectives), as in *outdo, outclimb, outgrow, outlift; outbreak, outburst, outcry, outgrowth; outbound, outgoing, outworn*

over- (meaning "over, beyond, excessive," and added to adjectives, verbs, and nouns), as in *overactive, overcautious, overdependent; overact, overburden, overcharge; overconcern, overdecoration, oversupply*

under- (meaning "under, below, beneath," and added to verbs, nouns, and adjectives), as in *undercook, underpay, underuse; undercarriage, underclass, underground; underlying, underqualified, undersea*

An example of an unproductive prefix is *ad-* (meaning "toward") and its variant forms *a-, ab-, ac-, af-, ag-, al-, an-, ap-, ar-, as-,* and *at-,* found in words taken from Latin or French, such as *adjoin, ascribe, abbreviate, accede, affix, agglutinate, allude, annul, apprehend, arrogant, assist,* and *attract.* Another unproductive prefix is *con-* (meaning "together") and its variant forms *col-, com-,* and *cor-,*

found in words taken from Latin or French, such as *conceal, confess, collect, collide, compose, comprise, correct, corrode.* These prefixes are so imbedded in the words in which they came into English that they are no longer recognizable as prefixes.

SUFFIXES

Suffixes are so common in English that they are hardly noticed. Consider this opening passage from Norman Vincent Peale's best-seller, *The Power of Positive Thinking*:

> Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy . . . A sense of inferiority and inadequacy interferes with the attainment of your hopes, but self-confidence leads to self-realization and successful achievement.

Without suffixes these sentences couldn't have been written, yet it takes some effort to spot them. If you try, you will find at least seven of them: *-able, -ence, -ity, -ful, -cy, -ment, -ion.* If you rewrite the last sentence to avoid suffixes: "A sense of being inferior and inadequate interferes with the achieving of your hopes, but confidence in yourself leads to realizing your potential and achieving success," you end up with a clumsily worded sentence that still includes four suffixes, *-ate, -ing* (three times), *-ence,* and *-al.*

Dictionaries rarely bother to define the words formed with suffixes, running them in instead like afterthoughts at the end of a main entry. While the word *humble,* used in Dr. Peale's exhortation, is treated royally in the dictionary, with a full complement of definitions, its derivatives, *humbleness, humbler, humblingly,* and *humbly,* are listed in the last line in secondary boldface. So if you want to know what these run-on entries mean, you have to look up the suffixes *-ness, -er, -ingly,* and *-ly* in the dictionary and attach them to the word *humble.* Luckily, most native speakers know what these simple suffixes mean, just as they are familiar with every one of the seven suffixes in Dr. Peale's pep talk. Other suffixes are less transparent.

For example, the suffix *-ee.* A surprisingly large number of words having this suffix are found regularly in print, words like *adaptee, electee, examinee, franchisee, mergee, rescuee, transportee,* but what they mean precisely is uncertain. That is because the suffix is ambiguous. Originally, *-ee* was a technical suffix in legal English, adapted from the French ending *-é,* and used along with the suffix *-or* in pairs like *appellor* and *appellee, mortgagor* and *mortgagee,* the first referring to the person who performs a particular action, the second referring to the person who is the recipient of the action. Later, *-ee* began to be used loosely in such nonce words as *educatee* (someone educated) and *releasee* (one released from jail), but also in ordinary words like *addressee* (one who is addressed), *deportee, nominee,* and *trainee.* But things got complicated when the suffix took on the meaning of one who performs a particular action (rather than being the object or recipient of the action) in such words as *absentee* (one who absents him- or herself), *escapee, retiree, returnee,* and others. This is a suffix that is not always self-explanatory.

Suffixes, like prefixes, can be productive or unproductive. The suffixes mentioned above, *-able, -al, -cy, -ence, -ful ,-ing -ion, -ity,* and *-ment* are productive, i.e., they are able to form new words. Examples of unproductive suffixes include *-or* (as in *editor, sailor, escalator*), *-ule* (as in *module, molecule, globule*), and *-ure* (as in *culture, failure, moisture*).

Suffixes often occur in associative sets, as, for example, *-ism, -ist,* and *-ize* in *terrorism, terrorist, terrorize,* or in cumulative sets, as

-ism, -ist, -istic, and *-istically* in *antagonism, antagonist, antagonistic, antagonistically.* Such a build-up of suffixes is called "suffix suffocation" in Jeffrey McQuain's *Power Language.*

> Wordwise, the poorest of all suffix forms is *-wise.* A charity worker says, 'We gave back volunteer-wise.' A singles group worries about the future 'relationship-wise,' while a politician tries to rebuild 'staff-wise.' Rarely does a noun benefit from this addition . . . In fact, almost any suffix helps suffocate the noun it appends; this tendency to let the ends of words grow in length draws strength away from their message.

Another problem with certain suffixes, especially the noun-forming suffixes *-cy, -ity, -ness,* and *-tion,* is their duplication of meaning. Synonymous pairs like *obduracy* and *obdurateness, aridity* and *aridness, completion* and *completeness, corruption* and *corruptness, ferocity* and *ferociousness, torridity* and *torridness* can create doubt and confusion in an inexperienced writer. "When such a pair exists," Porter Perrin suggests, "take the one that is more familiar to you or that fits best in the rhythm of the sentence."

Suffixes serve to form nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. The following is a selection of common suffixes arranged by their parts of speech:

noun suffixes

-age (added to nouns and verbs, as in *mileage, percentage; breakage, spillage*)

-an or *-ian* (added to place names, as in *Chilean, Moroccan; Egyptian, Iranian*)

-ance (added to verbs, as in *attendance, disturbance, performance,* and to adjectives ending in *-ant,* as in *elegance, relevance, vigilance*)

-ant (added to verbs, as in *assistant, attendant, consultant*)

-ation (added to verbs, as in *combination, information*)

-cy (added to adjectives ending in *-t* or *-te,* as in *accountancy, privacy*)

-dom (added to nouns and adjectives, as in *kingdom, filmdom, freedom*)

-er (added to verbs, as in *player, reader, mixer, babysitter*)

-ful (added to nouns, as in *mouthful, pocketful, tablespoonful*)

-hood (added to nouns, as in *childhood, motherhood, priesthood*)

-ian (added to nouns and adjectives, as in *comedian, historian, Freudian*)

-ing (added to verbs and nouns, as in *building, swimming, flooring*)

-ion (added to verbs, as in *collection, exhibition, protection*)

-ism (added to nouns and adjectives, as in *heroism, idealism, sexism*)

-ist (added to nouns and adjectives, as in *expressionist, novelist, humanist*)

-ity (added to adjectives, as in *originality, personality, superiority*)

-ment (added to verbs, as in *establishment, excitement, investment*)

-ness (added to adjectives, as in *clumsiness, manliness, politeness*)

-*ship* (added to nouns, as in *citizenship, fellowship, workmanship*)

adjective suffixes

-*able* (added to verbs, as in *agreeable, imaginable, understandable*)

-*al* (added to nouns, as in *experimental, musical, traditional*)

-*ary* (added to nouns, as in *customary, honorary, momentary*)

-*ed* (added to nouns, as in *bearded, bowlegged, big-headed*)

-*en* (added to nouns, as in *ashen, golden, leaden*)

-*ful* (added to nouns, as in *boastful, joyful, sinful*)

-*ible* (added to verbs, as in *collectible, convertible, digestible*)

-*ic* (added to nouns, as in *angelic, artistic, heroic*)

-*ing* (added to verbs, as in *compelling, entertaining, pressing*)

-*ish* (added to adjectives and nouns, as in *childish, fiendish; shortish, whitish*)

-*y* (added to nouns, as in *cloudy, greedy, earthy, jazzy*)

adverb suffixes

-*ly* (added to adjectives, as in *awkwardly, brightly, fluently, randomly*)

-*ward* (added to nouns, as in *backward, earthward, northward, rearward*)

-*wise* (added to nouns, as in *clockwise, crosswise, healthwise, salarywise*)

verb suffixes

-*en* (added to adjectives and nouns, as in *freshen, quicken; hearten, strengthen*)

-*ize* (added to nouns, as in *criticize, moralize, patronize, pasteurize*)

To sum up, prefixes and suffixes are rich sources of new words in English and in many modern languages. Without their ability to change grammatical functions and meanings, our vocabulary would be greatly diminished and devoid of variety and expressiveness. As Aldous Huxley stated (in a 1945 essay, "Words and Reality"), "Lacking a proper vocabulary, people find it hard, not only to think about the most important issues of life, but even to realize that these issues exist."

CHAPTER 32

reduplication:

flip-flopping higgledy-piggledy through the riffraff

In the chapter on **Onomatopoeia,** we touched on sound symbolism, or the indication of meaning through the sound of words. To illustrate this phenomenon, we described the initial cluster *fl-* as being associated with "quick motion" in words like *flee, flip, flit, flop, flow, flurry, flutter, fly.* A word in which the *fl-* cluster is redoubled is *flip-flop.* This word made headlines during the presidential election campaign of 2004, when the Democratic candidate was widely described by his opponents as a *flip-flopper* who *flip-flopped* on crucial political issues.

Flip-flop has been in the language for over 400 years. Starting out as a concise description of the act of flipping and flopping in the wind, as wings, flags, and shutters do, it took on several other meanings, such as a backward somersault, a backless sandal, an electronic circuit having alternative states,

and, figuratively, a wavering, waffling, or indecisiveness on the part of—well, a political candidate. *Flip-flop* has sound symbolism: we can hear in the *fl-* clusters the sound of flipping in one direction and flopping in another. It is also visually suggestive, evoking the image of things that flip and flop, as a pair of sandals flip-flopping in sand on a beach. But perhaps most importantly, the word is compelling because of its emphatic doubling of the syllable *fl-*. This doubling of a syllable or word element to strengthen or emphasize meaning is called by linguists *reduplication.*

Reduplication is a productive process found in many languages, in a variety of functions. "Nothing is more natural," writes the American linguist Edward Sapir in his classic work, *Language,*

> than the prevalence of reduplication, in other words, the repetition of all or part of the radical element. The process is generally employed, with self-evident symbolism, to indicate such concepts as distribution, plurality, repetition, customary activity, increase of size, added intensity, continuance. . . . In a class by themselves are the really enormous number of words, many of them sound-imitative or contemptuous in psychological tone, that consist of duplications with either change of the vowel or change of the initial consonant—words of the type *sing-song, riff-raff, wishy-washy, harum-scarum, roly-poly.* Words of this type are all but universal.

Reduplications—or reduplicatives, as such words are often called—have been classified in various ways. Where the word or element is simply repeated, as in *bye-bye, cha-cha, goody-goody, hubba-hubba, no-no, pooh-pooh, rah-rah, so-so,* the reduplication is called a ***tautonym*** (from the Greek, meaning "of the same name"). This

word was originally used in scientific names of animals in which the genus and species are identical, as *Anser anser* for the greylag goose, *Ciconia ciconia* for the white stork, and *Buteo buteo* for the common buzzard. Where the repeated word or element is modified, as in *chit-chat, dilly-dally, helter-skelter, higgledy-piggledy, hoity-toity, pitter-patter, roly-poly, shilly-shally,* the reduplication is called a ***ricochet word***, a term coined by E. C. Brewer in his *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1870). These two types differ from ***rhyming compounds***, in which the two elements are unrelated words that rhyme, such as *bigwig, hi-fi, hotshot, humdrum, jet set, ragtag, sci-fi,* and *sky-high.*

A special kind of ricochet word is the so-called "schm-/shm- reduplication," which came into English from Yiddish (where it is used to dismiss or disparage, as in *koyfn, shmoyfn,* "to buy, not to buy, who cares?"—*koyfn,* "to buy") and entrenched itself, especially in American slang, over the last century. The prefix *schm-* or *shm-*, found in various slang words borrowed from Yiddish, such as *schlep, schlock, schmear, schmooze, schnook, schnoz,* was first used to form a reduplication in *fancy-schmancy,* which vaudeville comedians popularized in the sense of "pretentious, affected." This led to the use of *schm-/shm-* as a deprecatory prefix in many ad hoc formations, such as: (adjectives) *old-schmold, patient-schmatient;* (nouns) *love-schmove, money-schmoney, value-schmalue, revolution-schmevolution;* (verbs) *eat-schmeat, manage-schmanage, pray-schmay,* the two words often separated by a comma. True to its comic origins, these reduplicatives are often used jocularly and with a follow-up clause, as in these classic exchanges:

Woman (to Friend): I heard that Mrs. Knobl's son has an Oedipus complex.

Friend: Oedipus, schmoedipus—as long as he loves his mother.

Man (to Friend): The doctor thinks I may have cancer.

Friend: Cancer, shmancer—as long as you're healthy.

In the classifications above, the reduplicatives are grouped according to the forms they take. Another way of classifying them is according to their purpose or origin. They could be onomatopoeic, imitative of sounds, like *bow-wow, choo-choo, ding-dong, ha-ha, ho-hum, pooh-pooh, tick-tock, tsk-tsk*; or they could be words coined after such sounds, like *claptrap* ("empty action or talk," from an actor's device to get applause), *hurdy-gurdy* (a barrel organ), *hush-hush* ("secret, confidential"), *gobbledygook* ("nonsense," like the gobbling of the turkey cock), *mumbo jumbo* (probably altered from *mumble-jumble*).

Other reduplicatives are expressive, intensive, or emphatic repetitions, such as *goody-goody, no-no, pooh-pooh,* and *so-so,* but a more common type has contrastive vowels or consonants, and generally resembles rhyming compounds (except that one or both of the two parts are often meaningless), for example, *fiddle-faddle, hanky-panky, helter-skelter, hodgepodge, hoity-toity, hurly-burly, knickknack, loosey-goosey, mishmash, namby-pamby, niminy-piminy, nitty-gritty, shilly-shally,* and *tittle-tattle.*

A final group of reduplicatives are loanwords (see the chapter on **Loanwords and their Sources**), such as *beriberi* (disease of the nerves caused by a vitamin deficiency, from Sinhalese, reduplication of *beri,* "weakness"); *bric-a-brac* ("trinkets, knick-knacks," from French, a reduplication probably based on the phrase *à bric et à brac,* "any which way"); *mahimahi* (the dolphin, from Hawaiian, reduplication of old Hawaiian *mahi,* "strong"); *ylangylang* (an East Indian tree, or its oil, from Tagalog *ilang-ilang*); *couscous* (semolina dish, from Arabic *kuskus*); *lava-lava* (Polynesian garment, from Samoan *lavalava,* "clothing").

Still another way of classifying reduplicatives is according to

their function or meaning. This method also suggests the development of reduplication from simple baby talk to more complex uses. It goes roughly like this:

1. ***Baby talk:*** This includes children's reduplications, like *bye-bye, choo-choo, doo-doo, pee-pee, wee-wee,* and words of baby-talk origin, like *baby, daddy, mama, mommy, nanny, papa, poppy.* Foreign examples: French *bébé,* Spanish *nene.*

2. ***Diminutives:*** Includes endearments and pet names, such as *honey-bunny, itty-bitty, itsy-bitsy, lovey-dovey,* and affectionate proper names like *Georgie-Porgie, John-John,* and *Jen-Jen.* Foreign examples: Tagalog *mahiyahiya,* "be little ashamed" (*mahiya* "ashamed"); Swahili *maji-maji,* "a little wet" (*maji,* "wet").

3. ***Belittling:*** Includes such forms as *claptrap, dilly-dally, fiddle-dee-dee, flimflam, hobnob, shilly-shally, wishy-washy,* and other terms denoting insignificance or contempt. Foreign examples: Dutch *mik-mak,* "worthless things"; German *Pille-palle,* "trifles"; Yiddish *gelt, schmelt,* "money-schmoney."

4. ***Repetitiveness:*** Includes such forms as *boogie-woogie, chitchat, pitter-patter, seesaw, walkie-talkie.* Foreign examples: Hawaiian *wiki-wiki,* "quickly" (*wiki,* "quick"); Mongolian *bayn-bayn,* "repeatedly"; Hindi *kit-kit,* "monotonous repetition"; Chinese Pidgin English *chop-chop,* "quickly" (*chop,* "quick").

5. ***Discontinuity:*** Includes such forms as *knickknack, hodge-podge, mishmash, pellmell,* and other terms denoting nonuniformity. Foreign examples: Japanese *tokoro-dokoro,* "scattered"; Somali *fen-fen,* "to gnaw on all sides" (*fen,* "to gnaw at"); Chinook (Native American) *iwi iwi,* "look about carefully, examine" (*iwi,* "appear").

Grammatical uses of reduplication have been widely recorded in numerous languages, an exception being English. Examples of such uses include:

Plurals: Noun plurals are indicated by reduplicating the noun. For example: Hebrew *ish-ish,* "every man, everyone" (*ish,* "man"); Chinese *renren,* "everybody" (*ren,* "person"); Bahasa Malay *rumah-rumah,* "houses" (*rumah,* "house"); Indonesian *anak-anak,* "children" (*anak,* "child"); Ilocano (Philippines) *pingpingan,* "dishes" (*pingan,* "dish").

Verbs: Various modifications of the meaning of simple verbs are indicated by reduplication. The best-known ones are the initial reduplications in the older Indo-European languages to help form the past tense of many verbs. For example: Sanskrit *bharti,* "he bears," *bibharti,* "he bears up," *bhari-barti,* "he bears off violently"; Greek *leipo,* "I leave," *leloipa,* "I left"; Latin *cado,* "I fall," *cecidi,* "I fell."

By contrast with borrowed words, whose histories are usually transparent, most native English reduplicatives have obscure histories. For example:

chitchat "casual talk," is a reduplication of *chat.* But what is the origin of *chit*? It may be an earlier imitative word *chit,* "twitter," or an earlier *chit-chit-chat,* imitative of a squeaking sound. Most likely the words originated as a varied reduplication using the alternating vowels *i* and *a,* as in *dilly-dally, flimflam, mishmash, riffraff.*

dilly-dally "waste time," varied reduplication of *dally,* "act playfully."

flimflam "a deception, swindle," a varied reduplication of no known word.

mishmash "a confused mixture," apparently a varied reduplication of *mash*, "soft, pulpy mass." But compare German *Mischmasch*, with the same meaning, a reduplication of the verb *mischen*, "to mix."

riffraff "low-class people, rabble," from earlier *rif and raf*, "every bit or particle, worthless things," from Old French *rif et raf*, of uncertain origin.

shilly-shally "vacillating, wavering," varied reduplication of *shall I? shall I?*, one of the few reduplications of clearcut origin. Compare *willy-nilly*.

wishy-washy "indecisive, irresolute," varied reduplication of *washy*, "weak, thin, diluted."

fuddy-duddy "stuffy, old-fashioned person," a rhyming reduplication of no known word.

helter-skelter "in a disorderly or haphazard manner," a rhyming reduplication of no known word.

higgledy-piggledy "in disorder or confusion," a rhyming reduplication of no known word, but perhaps influenced by *pig*.

nitty-gritty "essential part, core," a rhyming reduplication of no known word.

roly-poly "short and plump," a rhyming reduplication, perhaps of *roll*.

seesaw "plank for moving up and down," varied reduplication of *saw*, "cutting tool," probably coined in imitation of the back-and-forth motion of one sawing wood.

super-duper "first-rate, topnotch," rhyming reduplication of *super*, "excellent."

teeny-weeny "very small, tiny," rhyming reduplication of *teeny*.

willy-nilly "willingly or not," rhyming reduplication of *will I, nill I* or *will he, nill he* or *will ye, nill ye*.

Reduplication was well known and much used in early Modern English. The following three examples from Shakespeare are typical:

> See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief . . . change places, and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? (*King Lear*)
> (*handy-dandy*, "in quick alternation," rhyming reduplication of *handy*)

> The people muddied . . . in their thoughts and whispers,
> For good Polonius' death. And we have done him greenly
> In huggermugger to inter him. (*Hamlet*)
> (*huggermugger*, "in secret haste, any which way," rhyming reduplication of no known word)

> *First Witch:* When shall we three meet again?
> In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
> *Second witch:* When the hurly-burly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won. (*Macbeth*)
> (*hurly-burly*, "commotion, uproar," rhyming reduplication of *hurly*, altered from *hurling*, "tumult," gerund of *hurl*)

Reduplication is a redoubling of sounds, and it is well known that the repetition of sounds is pleasurable to the ear. It

is what creates rhyme in poetry. Both children and adults delight in rhymed verses such as these from Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee":

It was many and many a year ago
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

(Notice the repetition in "many and many" and "to love and be loved.")

The pleasure of repetition is also illustrated by the whimsical rhymes of limericks:

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were caught, so what could they do?
Said the fly, "Let us flee."
"Let us fly," said the flea.
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.
(Anonymous)

CHAPTER 33

retronyms:

new terms for old things

When the first automobiles made their appearance in the 1890s, they were so noisy and got stuck in the mud so often that pedestrians made it a habit to yell at the drivers "Get a horse, fellow!" Since for many centuries the only carriages were those drawn by horses, it was natural to rename the newfangled self-propelled car a "horseless carriage." A similar advance in technology caused moviegoers in the 1930s to refer to the earlier films without a soundtrack as "silent movies." Closer to our time, technological advances prompted the use of such terms as "manual typewriter" when the electronic typewriter came around, "rotary telephone" when the push-button phone became the norm, and "snail mail," "paper mail," "hard mail," and "postal mail" when electronic mail (or e-mail) practically replaced the former as the everyday form of

correspondence. (Some old-timers still remember when "surface mail" was coined to contrast with the new "air mail"). All of these terms for old or outmoded things have come to be known as *retronyms.*

In *What's the Good Word?* (1982), William Safire defined *retronyms* as "nouns that have taken an adjective to stay up-to-date and to fend off newer terms." He cites as an example the word *guitar.* When *guitar* was replaced by an *electric guitar,* the old original became known by the retronym *acoustic guitar.* In his next book, *Language Maven Strikes Again* (1990), he gives as an example the noun *watch,* which originally sufficed as the word for a timepiece (derived from the idiom *to keep watch* or *vigil* and first recorded in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*). When the word *wristwatch* appeared in the late 1800s, it became necessary to coin the retronym *pocket watch* for the earlier kind. Then, in the 1970s, when the *digital watch* (or *clock*) made its debut, a term was needed for its precursor, the old-fashioned timepiece that shows time by the position of the hands on a dial, and the retronym *analog watch* (or *clock*) was created.

Another language maven, Richard Lederer, in a January 2003 column titled "Retro-active words," writes:

> I remember being astonished when one of my students at St. Paul's School told me that he had missed my class because he has set his alarm for P.M. rather than A.M. On our old clocks, that would have been impossible, but on digital clocks it happens all the time. So what used to be just a clock (or watch) is now an analog, versus a digital, clock.

Much has been written about retronyms over the past twenty years. While the word (from *retro-*, "backward" + *-(o)nym,* "word, name") has so far eluded most standard dictionaries

(though scooped in 2000 by the *American Heritage Dictionary,* 4th ed.), it has been widely discussed and variously defined by word connoisseurs like Safire, Lederer, and others. Richard Lederer's definition: "A retronym is an adjective-noun pairing generated by a change in the meaning of the noun, usually because of advances in technology. Retronyms, like retrospectives, are backward glances."

The writer Charles McGrath, in a feature article in *The New York Times* (Dec. 26, 2004), defined *retronyms* as:

> retoolings or respecifications of old words that have been made necessary by new technology, the most famous examples being 'snail mail,' 'analog watch,' and 'black-and-white TV.' With just a little stretching you could also include 'Classic Coke,' 'two-parent family' and 'free parking.'

Paul Dickson, in his book, *Words* (1982), defined a *retronym* thus:

> A noun that has been forced to take on an adjective to stay up-to-date. For instance, *real cream* and *live performance* are retronyms for cream and performance that have been brought about with the advent of nondairy creamers and prerecorded performances.

David Grambs, in *Words About Words* (1982), defined a *retronym* as:

> an adjective-noun pairing that arises because newer senses of the noun, or new products, have made its meaning less clear, requiring the somewhat redundant modifier to restore its original or earlier sense, e.g., 'hardcover book' (because of the advent of

softcover books), 'stage play' (because of the advent of the television play), 'natural turf' (after the advent of 'artificial turf').

Retronym was coined by the journalist and author Frank Mankiewicz, who came up with the word in the 1970s while serving as president of National Public Radio (NPR). In his wide-ranging career, Mankiewicz had been a political adviser to senators, a television anchorman, and a syndicated newspaper columnist. In a March 2001 interview, he explained:

> When I came to NPR, I said I'm going to do three things. I'm never going to use 'impact' as a verb. I'm never going to use 'access' as a verb, and I'm never going to use the word 'telecommunications' at all. I've weakened a little on the telecommunications. . . . 'Retronym.' Bill Safire gives me credit for that regularly. It's a figure of speech, meaning a word that you now have to modify because of technology [or] modernism. I heard a couple of announcers once saying that so-and-so would do a good job in the Super Bowl because they play their home games on natural turf. Natural turf? That's what we used to call grass. And then, within a day, somebody said that her son had come to a party and they had asked him to play. And he hadn't brought his instrument, so he borrowed an acoustic guitar. Which is what we used to call a guitar. So then I began to think about it. You know, 'real cream' and 'live drama' and 'print journalists.' These are retronyms.

It has become a favorite pastime of language buffs to draw up lists of retronyms and invite volunteers to add to the lists. The results are rather mixed, because not all so-called retronyms pass muster. Is *classical music* really a retronym, or is it simply a style or genre of music? Is *blue-collar worker* a retronym or does it

denote a type of worker? Is *church wedding* a retronym or merely a statement of fact? Is *natural childbirth* a retronym? Is *Old Testament*? Clearly not all adjective-noun phrases can be called retronyms. If they could, terms like *Old English, old money, old school,* and *Old World* would all have to be called retronyms.

Genuine retronyms, writes Richard Lederer, "signal that the thing double-labeled has become outmoded and obsolete, the superseded exception rather than the rule." Or, as William Safire describes them, they are "throwback compounds." Many retronyms, however, are not relics of the past but simply contrastive or distinguishing terms, as, for example, *biological parent,* coined to contrast it with *adoptive parent, birth mother,* coined to distinguish it from *adoptive mother,* and *legitimate theater,* as opposed to *movie theater.* These pairs of terms and what they denote are equally current, except that the retronym denotes the older version.

RETRONYMS AND NEONYMS

Here is a list of retronyms, alongside the new terms that propelled their coinage, which we shall call *neonyms* (from *neo-*, "new" + *-(o)nym*, "word, name"):

retronym	***neonym***
acoustic guitar	electric guitar
analog computer	digital computer
analog watch (or clock)	digital watch (or clock)
bar soap	liquid soap
black-and-white television	color television

cloth diapers	disposable diapers
corded drill	cordless drill
day game or day baseball	night game or night baseball
desktop computer	laptop computer
film camera	digital camera
fountain pen	ballpoint pen
hardcover book	softcover book
horse polo	water polo
human-readable	machine-readable
human translation	machine translation
impact printer	laser printer
manual transmission	automatic transmission
natural blonde	bleached blonde, peroxide blonde
natural language	artificial language, machine language
natural light	artificial light
network television	cable television
optical microscope	electron microscope
optical telescope	radio telescope
print book	e-book
print journalist/journalism	electronic journalist/journalism
propeller plane	jet plane

rotary phone	push-button phone
shell egg	dried egg, artificial egg
snow skiing/skier	water skiing/skier
stage play	TV (or radio) play
two-parent family	single-parent family
walk-in theater	drive-in theater
whole milk	skim milk

Not included in the above list are a number of retronyms that are distinguished from their corresponding neonyms by the adjectives *conventional, regular,* or *real,* such as:

conventional weapons (versus *biological, chemical,* or *nuclear* weapons)

conventional oven (versus *microwave oven*)

conventional photography (versus *digital photography*)

regular coffee (versus *decaffeinated coffee* or *decaf*)

regular gas (versus *unleaded gas*)

regular mail (versus *e-mail, fax mail, voice mail*)

real cream (versus *nondairy cream*)

real butter (versus a nondairy substitute)

IS THERE A NEED FOR RETRONYMS?

But is there really a need for retronyms? This question was raised in 2001 by the linguist Geoffrey Nunberg. In an article

titled "Old Words, New Tricks" in the magazine *California Lawyer*, Nunberg pointed out that when a new technology renders an old one obsolete, speakers usually continue to call it by the same name they used for the old one. We still call a watch a watch, whether it's mechanical or electric, analog or digital; and we call a guitar a guitar, whether it's acoustic or electric, classical or flamenco. "We still talk about 'dialing a number,' even if it's really a matter of punching it in. And some of us still describe the large white objects in our kitchens as 'iceboxes,' even if it makes our twelve-year-old daughter look at us strangely."

True enough. Most of us would rather adapt an old word to new uses than create a new word for every innovation. Newspapers include "letters to the editor" even though the bulk of them are not letters but e-mail messages, and we're used to speaking of our video library or software library, forgetting that a short time ago the word *library* was restricted to a collection of books (from Latin *liber*, "book"). Nunberg points out that people talk loosely about "record companies" and "record labels," but that doesn't mean that the word *record* has become a generic term that encompasses CDs and audio cassettes. It just means that most people prefer to use old, everyday words rather than new, technical ones.

On the other hand, when it becomes necessary to draw a distinction between a new and an old technology, we feel compelled to expand our vocabulary. When you want to sell your old car, camera, or clock, you're forced to use a retronym to describe it: *compact car, film camera, conventional clock, standard radio.* So retronyms are useful counterpoints to loose usage.

The person who has been most responsible for the hunting, discovery, discussion, and dissemination of retronyms is the language maven William Safire. Since the 1980s he has written more columns on the subject than anyone else, including the

word's coiner, Frank Mankiewicz. Safire has instituted a "Retronym Watch," in which he regularly features the most recent examples arriving on his desk. He is aided in the sport by an elite detachment of his Lexicographic Irregulars that focus on retronyms. The results of the Retronym Watch have appeared in a number of Safire's books, including *Watching My Language* (1997), *Let a Smile Be Your Umbrella* (2001), and *No Uncertain Terms* (2003).

In *Watching My Language*, Safire refers to what he calls a relative of the retronym, namely, new nouns formed from adjectives modifying old nouns. The examples he gives are *op-ed* for *op-ed page*, *zoo* for *zoological garden*, and *prefab* for *prefabricated house.* Other examples sent in by a reader are: *ad lib* (for *ad-lib remark*), *bell-bottoms* (for *bell-bottom trousers*), *bifocals* (for *bifocal lenses*), *convertible* (for *convertible-top car*), *daily* (for *daily newspaper*), *final* (for *final exam*), *glossies* (for *glossy photos*), and *oral* (for *oral exam*). We could also call them relatives of clippings like *ad, bus, cab, deli, lab, math* (see the chapter on **Clipping or Shortening**).

REVERSED RETRONYMS

By the way, there is another word-form also called a *retronym.* Puzzlers and word-game aficionados will recognize the word *retronym* as denoting a word or phrase that turns into a different word when spelled backward. For example, *desserts*, when spelled backward, becomes *stressed*; *mood*, spelled backward, becomes *doom.* This type of retronym is often called *reversal.* Trade names are sometimes formed with reversals: the name of the oral laxative *Serutan* was formed by spelling "natures" backward. Some given names and family names are retronymic: the names Nevaeh and Remle are reversals of "heaven" and Elmer, respectively. A street in Vancouver is named Adanac Street in honor of

Canada. Reversals should not be confused with anagrams, which are words or phrases formed by rearranging the letters of other words or phrases. Thus, the name *Erewhon,* coined by Samuel Butler as the name of a fictitious country in his 1872 utopian novel, *Erewhon,* though considered a reversal, is actually an anagram of the word *nowhere.*

Retronym is perhaps the most recent coinage using *-(o)nym,* a suffix meaning a name or word, and derived from Greek *ónyma,* dialectal variant of *ónoma,* "name." Most people are familiar with only a few of the fifty or more English words ending in *-(o)nym.* The words *synonym* and *antonym, homonym* and *heteronym, acronym, eponym, pseudonym,* and *toponym* are found in most standard dictionaries. But the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (*W3*) include many more, such as *autonym* ("a book published under the author's real name"), *caconym* ("a taxonomic name that is objectionable for linguistic reasons"), *mononym* ("a term consisting of one word only"), *paronym* ("a word which is derived from another, or from the same root; a derivative or cognate word"), *protonym* ("the first person or thing of the name; that from which another is named"), *tautonym* ("repetition of the word for genus and species [as] Rattus rattus"), and *trionym* ("a name consisting of three terms; a trinomial name in botany or zoology"). The *OED* has even an entry *onym,* derived from the suffix, and defined as "a proposed term for a technical name, as of a species or other group in zoology, etc., forming part of a recognized system of nomenclature."

PART 6

borrowing:

adopting words from foreign places