

Lexical Creativity in English: Minor Methods of Word Formation

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En el presente artículo pretendemos analizar el comportamiento de los métodos de formación de palabras en lengua inglesa. Una de las características fundamentales del inglés es su elevado nivel de creatividad léxica a través de diversos procesos morfológicos tales como la producción de compuestos, la derivación o la conversión gramatical. Sin embargo, existen otros métodos menores de formación de palabras que no han sido tan ampliamente estudiados y sobre los que apenas existen referencias bibliográficas. Entre ellos podemos localizar los clippings, blends y acrónimos. Por ello, es nuestro objetivo fundamental intentar establecer una descripción de estos fenómenos a través de un corpus de ejemplos extraídos de revistas destinadas a un público adolescente, basándonos para ello en los estudios realizados por Quirk (1997) y Bauer (1983).

In the following article we intend to analyse the behaviour of the minor methods of word formation of the English language. English is characterised by its high level of lexical creativity through different morphological processes, such as compounding, derivation or conversion. Nevertheless, we can also find other minor methods of word formation such as “clippings”, “blends” and “acronyms”. They have not been so widely analysed and very few academic studies can be found about them. Hence, the main objective of our article is to present a description of these phenomena by focusing on a corpus of examples obtained from different teenagers’ magazines. The main theoretical basis will be obtained from Quirk (1997) and Bauer (1983).

Palabras clave: morfología, formación de palabras, métodos menores, clippings, blends, acrónimos.

Keywords: Morphology, word formation, minor methods, clippings, blends, acronyms.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is a very productive language as regards lexical items. One of the means of language creativity is word formation, within which we can include three main methods: compounding, derivation and conversion. They have been widely used as tools for lexical creativity all throughout the evolution of English. However, one of the main characteristics of Modern English is the use of miscellaneous modes of word formation.

Apart from derivation, compounding and conversion, there are other methods of word formation, which receive different names depending on the author who analyses them. Laurie Bauer (1983: 232) calls them “unpredictable formations”, because “it is by no means clear that the forms of these words can be predicted by rules without appealing to such ill-understood notions as euphony”. On the other hand, Quirk (1997: 1580) groups them under the name “miscellaneous modes” as their behaviour is not yet very clear. However, both grammarians agree to include within this group the so-called clippings, blends and acronyms, even if some examples of reduplications and coinages can also be found. Due to their novelty and the lack of comprehensive studies that analyse these three categories, they will become the focus of this article.

In addition to the previously mentioned unpredictability, all these processes of word-formation have a main characteristic in common: they belong to a very colloquial style of language. However, some of them have already been introduced into the standard language because of their common usage. Taking into account this characteristic, we have decided that teenagers' magazines are one of the most accurate places where they could be found, because of their tendency to use very colloquial language as a means to avoid the formality that can be found in some other magazines. Hence, British and American teenager magazines will make up our main corpus of study. Nevertheless, we can not forget that these types of words can also be located in specialised language texts, such as those dealing with computers, medicine, chemistry or politics. It is also

necessary to note that acronyms are most commonly found there. One important thing to be taken into account is that both British and American English have a different behaviour as regards this aspect of the language. From looking at the corpus, we have noticed a higher tendency in British English to use this kind of informality mark.

Taking into account the previously mentioned facts, our main objective is to present an overview of one of the characteristics of Modern English: minor methods of word formation. We intend to make a qualitative analysis in which the behaviour of the resulting words is analysed, without dealing with their frequency of appearance. Previous analyses have attempted to establish a taxonomy of this type of methods of word-formation, with a focus on blends, by highlighting the number of times each type appears. (cf. López Rua 2004; Gries 2004)

There are not many theories referred to this aspect of the English language. Thus, we are going to follow the analysis and classifications developed by Quirk and Bauer. However, our intention is to obtain our own conclusions by looking at the behaviour of these words in a language-in-use context. Thus, the article will be developed around a theoretical basis which we will attempt to prove by looking at the examples found in the corpus.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1. Clippings

One of the most important, and probably the most frequent, methods is clipping. Quirk describes this process as “a polysyllabic word shortened often to a single syllable”. He also adds that “this process occurs especially in nouns” (1997: 1580). Bauer’s definition is slightly different and uttered in more scientific terms, as he understands clipping “as the process whereby a lexeme is shortened, while still retaining the same meaning and still being a member of the same form class. Frequently clipping results in a change of stylistic level” (1983: 233). We can then say that both grammarians set one of the most important characteristics referred to clippings. They are shortened words with a really high informality mark. An example of how the informality can be used is seen

in the name of one of the magazines used in our corpus, *Teen*, which is the shortened word for "teenager". This is used as a way of calling the attention of the group of people to which the magazine is addressed, because, this way, they can see the magazine is going to be using their own language, whereas if they used "teenager" it would be more likely to be thought for another kind of readers. Hence, we can state that it is a pragmatic device for attention-calling.

We can also find that both Quirk and Bauer have a classification for clippings. As these classifications do not substantially differ, we have decided to follow Quirk's. For Quirk (1997: 1580) the first group of clippings is formed by those words in which "the surviving fragment is usually initial." This group of clippings could be called back clippings and it is the most common one, as most of the examples could be placed under this group.

(1) "We've just been out to the States (again) to shoot the American **vid** for *It's The Things You Do*" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 10)

(2) "The barmy Steps crew are in Japan at the **mo'**, doing loads of promotion, then, they'll fly back to Blighty for their Christmas **hols**" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 5)

There are two types of back clippings depending on whether any modification in spelling is produced. Examples of unmodified back clippings could be the informal word "vid" (1)¹, which is the clipped form of "video", and the reduced word "mo" (2), used instead of "moment". However, in the last example we should be aware of the use of the apostrophe in the clipped form. This is a way of showing the informality and the shortening of the word with an orthographic sign.

(3) "Reader's **prob**" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 30)

(4) "**Ex** encounters" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 41)

(5) "The **ex-files**. How to act when it's over." (*Teen*, Jan. 2000)

In (3), the word "prob" is used instead of "problem". Whenever clippings are used in titles, the actual meaning of the word is easily inferred as they are placed in specific parts of the magazines. For instance,

this example is placed under the title of one of the sections of the magazines which aims to function like a consultancy place, whereas (4), was placed under "dating". This location lets the reader know that the prefix "ex", used here as a clipped form of "ex-boyfriend", means exactly that and it doesn't mean "ex- friends" or any other thing belonging to the past. Hence, we can say that the linguistic and background contexts are very important to infer the meaning of the clipped forms. This example is also important because it shows the unpredictability of these items. That is, clippings are usually the outcome of the shortening of a long word. Nevertheless, in "ex encounters" (4) or "ex-files" (5) the remaining part is also the consequence of another process of word formation: affixation. Moreover, the importance of the context is proved by the word "ex-files" (5), where a wordplay is produced, as the clipped form "ex" is pronounced the same as the letter "X" which is the original one used for the name of the television program "X-files". This "confusion" would not have been possible if the extended word "ex-boyfriend" had been used.

(6) "The Girls will very probably be doing some Christmas **telly**, but, sadly, nothing's been confirmed yet". (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 3)

(7) "Nothing is confirmed at this time", a Saints **spokey** told us." (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 7)

As we have mentioned before, there are back clippings in which there has been a modification in the spelling, such as the addition of a letter. This letter is mainly -y. For example we have the word "telly" (6), which is the informal word for "television", in which the final part of the word has been deleted, but a "-y" has been added, and, consequently, the "l" has been doubled. The same thing has happened with "spokey" (7), which is the clipped form of the compound "spokesperson" in which the second component of the merger has been replaced by "-y".

(8) "They split up, but she still believes in life after love. Good on ye, **grandma!**" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 9)

A different change in spelling is seen in "grandma" (8). In this case the "o" in "grandmother" becomes an "a" in the clipped form "grandma". This is caused by a phonological assimilation, that is, the clipped form has been transformed so as to sound as similar as possible

to the original word, and if the “o” had been kept at the end of the word it would have been pronounced /??/, which would not be similar to the original word.

(9) "So Lee, Faye, Claire or Lisa, if you're stuck for any last minute **Chrimbo** present ideas for the young scamp, we can offer just one suggestion: anything but those **flippin'** monkey T-shirts!" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 4)

(10) "A bit like a certain breakfast show couple? Nah, that was **jus'** rumours" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 3)

Another case of back clipping is the one in which only one letter has been taken out of the word and replaced by an apostrophe. This is the case of “flippin’” (9), in which the final “g” has been replaced by the apostrophe or “jus’” (10), in which the “t” has also been deleted and replaced by the apostrophe. We have noticed that the use of the apostrophe in the clipped forms is much more common in British English than in American English. These types of clippings seem to occur whenever there is a silent letter in pronunciation and they aim at achieving an orality trait.

Another curious thing referred to the spelling of back clippings is the way they sometimes preserve the final “s” in the shortened form (Quirk 1997: 1581), such as in the case of the word “hols” (2), which is the shortened form of “holidays”. This “-s” would not be a plural mark in this word, but the preservation of the final letter of the word “holidays”, in which the “-s” is not a plural mark.

According to Quirk (ibid), the second group of clippings is that in which “the clipped form has resulted from discarding the initial part of a word.” In this case, the final part of the word is retained. The shortened words in this group could be called fore clippings.

(11) "Snag one of these four sparkling-new Conair Smash brushes in a shade that's in tune with your **tude**" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 18)

(12) "**Net** result: [...] Not once did you mention how extremely dangerous it can be to meet someone on the Internet" (*Seventeen*, Jan. 2000: 10)

(13) "The **e-mail** and the article's opening paragraphs almost suggested that the perpetrators of the Littleton massacre has a justification for their crime" (*Seventeen*, Jan. 2000: 10)

Examples of this type of clippings are "tude" (11), in which the first part of the word "attitude" has been deleted, and there is also an apostrophe to mark the shortening of a word. Moreover, a pragmatic effect of attention-calling by producing a rhyme seems to be achieved. "Net" (12) could be another example of a fore clipping. In this case "net" is the shortened word for "Internet". If we look at the context in which this word appears, we can see that the longer lexical unit also appears in the same paragraph. However, each of them aims at achieving a different effect, as the clipped form appears in the title – so that the attention of the reader is called – whereas the long form can be found in the development of the article – in a place that readers have only reached if they are interested in the topic. We can say that computer words are a lexical field from which a high amount of clipped forms can be obtained. That is the case of "e-mail" (13) in which the first "e" would be the clipped form for the word "electronic".

(14) "It was cool, '**cos**, as you know, I've a (not-so) secret desire to appear in a blockbuster, and the **vid** was based on *Days Of Thunder*." (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 10)

(15) "Kelly thinks that this is the perfect skirt to wear at a Faith Hill concert '**cause** of its trendy country style' " (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 20)

Still belonging to this second group of fore clippings, we have found an interesting example to illustrate a difference between British English and American English. The clipping for "because" is spelled in a different way depending on the variety of English used. In British English, it is spelled "cos" (14), i.e. there is a tendency for a change in spelling to create the informality by both methods, the shortening of a word and a spelling which is closer to the pronunciation. On the other hand, American English tends to shorten the word without changing its spelling, as we can see in "cause" (15).

(16) "**Phys Ed** was taking place indoors because of rain" (*Seventeen*, Jan. 2000: 12)

(17) "Only two inches wide, these speakers are totally **hi-tech** with great sound and design." (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 28)

In his classification, Bauer (1983: 233) adds another kind of clippings, which are those in which "clipped forms are used in compounds". Although Bauer's explanation for this phenomenon is not clear, we will consider compound clippings those lexical items which are the outcome of a process of compounding, and in which at least one of the items that make up the compound is the outcome of a clipping process. Examples of this kind could be "Phys Ed" (16) – which stands for "physical education" – in which both components of the compound are clipped; "hi-tech" (17) for "high-technology"; or "e-mail" (13), in which only the first of the components of the word is clipped. In these examples we can see that clipped compounds behave in the same way as single compounds do as regards spelling rules and the use of the hyphen.

(18) "**Jess** is checking her email" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 21)

Although the usual rule for clipped forms (Quirk 1997: 1581) states that proper names are not usually clipped, we can sometimes find clipped names of people, to achieve an informality effect. This is the case of "Jess" (18), which is the clipped form of "Jessica".

(19) "Visit romantic getaways and islands, check out **photos** from around the world or find the best restaurants in your own city" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 30)

(20) "You're at the movies with the **cutie** from **chem** class." (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 41)

As regards the grammatical behaviour of clippings, it is important to say that most clipped words are nouns, and thus they can behave and function as any other noun. This way, "spokey" (7) would be the subject of the sentence, and moreover, it can also be premodified by any other noun. Also functioning as a subject, we have the clipped form "photos" (19), used for "photographs". Clippings can also be used in prepositional phrases, such as in "from chem class" (20), in which the clipped form for "chemistry" is following the preposition "from", and it is, in turn, modifying the following noun, which demonstrates how clippings can also function as nominal adjectives.

(21) "You meet your friends at your school's football game and just like old times, they're hanging out with your **ex's** pals" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 41)

(22) "The **Zoners** are in France until December 18" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 3)

Nevertheless, not only do they play the same functions as nouns, but they also have other noun characteristics, such as the adding of "s" for the genitive to indicate possession, such as in "ex's" (21) in which the possessive "s" has been added to the clipped form; or they can undergo a derivation process, such as in the case of "Zoners" (22), which is a shortened word to name the components of the musical group "Boyzone". In this word, we can see how the suffix "-er" has been added to indicate "belonging to".

(23) "The group met up with the young **fans** during a visit to open the UK's largest centre for children with the rare blood disease haemophilia" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 5)

(24) "The boys will be spending a nice, quiet Christmas at home in Bucks with their parents and friends, opening **pressies** under the tree" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 8)

(25) "Simple **carbs** like fruits, **veggies** and milk should make up at least 40 percent of your daily calorie count" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 36)

(26) "These nifty black-and-white **pics** are taken from Leonardo's new flick *Celebrity*". (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 10)

(27) "If you like the official Five **piccies** free with this issue, be sure to buy the next issue of *Smash Hits*." (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 5)

Clipped nouns form their plural the same way any other noun would do. They can add "-s", such as in "fans" (23); they can also add "-es", as in "pressies" (24), where "-es" is added to "pressy" (clipped word for "present") and the "-y" changes into "i" as it would occur with any other noun. In "veggies" (25), apart from adding "-es" to form the plural we have to double the consonant and add "i" to "veg" – "vegetable"

- because it is a monosyllabic word. However, as we have mentioned above, we are dealing with unpredictable methods of word formation, and, consequently, the rules are not very well settled. This instability can be seen in the two possibilities for the plural form of “pic”: “pics” (26) and “piccies” (27). These two examples were even found in the same magazine, which emphasises the lack of foresight as regards the behaviour of these word formation methods.

(28) "Wear sneakers or flip-flops with these casual, **comfy** pants." (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 20)

(29) "So, does she have a **fave** scene so far?" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 60)

(30) "She's become the poster girl for go-for-it gusto, preferring to sport the simple, non-**glam** style she shares with her cool character." (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 58)

Nouns are not the only grammatical category that can be clipped. Following nouns in frequency, we can find clipped adjectives, such as “comfy” (28), instead of “comfortable”; or “fave” (29), rather than “favourite”. As any other adjective, clipped adjectives can be modified, as it occurs in “non-glam” (30), where the clipped form of the adjective “glamorous” is modified by “non”.

(31) "After Christmas, the boys will be performing four gigs in Ireland, so keep your ears open **'bout** that. (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec, 1998: 3)

We can also find examples of other grammatical categories, such as conjunctions – “cos” (14) or “cause” (15); prepositions – “bout” (31); or adverbs – “jus” (10)

Below, we can find a summary table with all the characteristics of clippings:

Phenomenon	Types	Spelling		Grammatical categories
Clippings	Back Clippings	No modification in spelling	No apostrophe to indicate clipped form	Nouns Adjectives Conjunctions Prepositions Adverbs
			Apostrophe to indicate clipped form	
		Modification in spelling	Addition of a letter (ex. y)	
			Modification due to phonological assimilation	
			Clipping & preservation of final "s"	
		No modification in spelling	No apostrophe	
	Apostrophe			
	Fore clippings	Modification in spelling	Difference between British English & Am English	
Compound clippings	Maintenance of hyphen			

Table . Summary of the characteristics of clippings.

2.2. Blends

Blends are another important method of word formation. Quirk defines them “as formations in which a compound is made by "blending" one word with another. Enough of each is normally retained so that the complex whole remains fairly readily analysable.” (1997: 1583). Moreover, Bauer defines them as “a new lexeme formed from parts of two (or possibly more) other words in such a way that there is no transparent analysis into morphs.” (1983: 234)

The most important characteristics of blends can be obtained from the previous definitions. They are formed by two words whose meanings are joined, but there is no rule that establishes which part of each word has to be retained. This is left to the creators’ choice, although they have to take into account pronounceability², spelling and the word’s identity as only one lexical item.

In the corpus of examples, we have noticed that blends do not seem to be a very frequently used process in language, although other studies on word formation state that they have a high productivity (López Rua 2004: 63).

According to Gries (2004: 645) different types of blends can be identified, taking into account the following criteria: the number of source words which enter into the blend, the number and the kind of words which are shortened, the kind of conflation (i.e. whether breakpoints can easily be identified), and the presence or absence of overlap of the source words in the blend. However, in this article we will only be dealing with what López Rua (2004: 65) and Gries (2004: 645) call “prototypical blends”, which are the outcome of the fusion between two clipped forms, and in which some type of overlapping – either graphemic or phonemic – can be found.

(32) "A thank you for making Friends America's number one **sitcom**" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 3)

The most prototypical example we have found in our corpus has been “sitcom” (32). As we can see, in this example both words have been clipped and the breakpoint between them is easily inferable. Moreover, it is easily pronounced and there is no overlap between the constituents.

“Chrimbo” (9) has been one of the most striking examples found in the corpus. First of all, the meaning could be hard to infer if the reader does not have a wide cultural knowledge about British traditions. We believe that the most accurate interpretation would be “Christmas Boxing Day”. Thus, it is a cultural referent to an exclusive British event “the first day (traditionally and strictly the first weekday) after Christmas, observed as a holiday” and it derives “from the custom of giving Christmas boxes to tradesman and staff on this day” (Collins English Dictionary 2001: 189). As a consequence, it does not appear in any of the American magazines. Looking at the linguistic context in which the word occurs provides us with further clues that support this interpretation, as it is premodified by “present ideas”. As regards the linguistic behaviour of the blend itself, the first part of “Christmas” has been retained and joined to the first part of “boxing”. General orthographic rules are maintained in the blend and, thus, “b” has to be preceded by “m”.

(33) "**Boyzalone**" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 5)

(34) "The **carbcutting** craze" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 36)

Examples of blends could be the title "Boyzalone", (33) and "carbcutting" (34). If we followed Bauer's definition (1983: 236), stated above, these two examples would not be identified as blends, but just as compounds formed by a clipping and a word. However, in all the types of blends identified by López Rua (2004: 68-9) whole words are considered to be proper constituents of a blend, as what distinguishes them from a compound is the degree of semantic integration between all the components of a lexical item. The word "Boyzalone"(33) would be then made up from the first part of the name of the musical group "Boyzone" and the word "alone", and it could be seen as a way of calling the reader's attention to that concrete article. As regards "carbcutting"(34), it is not easy to infer the meaning of the first part, "carb". However, the context tells us that "carb" stands for "carbohydrates", because it is later explained in the article, and "cutting" remains unchanged.

(35) "Use plum colors for olive or black skin [...]. The **How-tos**: To slim a round face, sweep the color from just above the apples of your cheeks toward your temples. *Teen*, Jan. 2000: 16)

Almost all of the previously mentioned examples of blends were just nouns, except (34), which was an adjective. But we can find more grammatical categories such as a non-finite verbal form used in a question which behaves, all together, as a single noun. This can be seen in (35). If we focus on the second part of the blending "how-tos", we can see that it is also the outcome of a blending process with a high degree of phonemic integration, which is reflected in a change in spelling. This makes it more difficult for the recipient to infer the meaning of the new lexical item. "Tos" is the blended form for "to use", in which the initial part of the first constituent is maintained. However, there is phonemic overlapping between the second part of the first constituent and the second constituent. This increases the difficulty of identifying the breakpoint between the two components of the new lexical item.

(36) "Don't miss the quiz- find out his **flirt'sonality**" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 11)

In (36), we can see how blends are used as a way of calling the reader's attention. The word “flirt'sonality” is the blend formed by the first part of the word “flirting”, which is reduced in such a way that we can infer the meaning, and the second part of the word “personality”. We can see that informality is increased by the use of the apostrophe that separates the two constituents.

Below we can find a summary table of all the previously mentioned characteristics of blends:

Phenomenon	Characteristics	Grammatical categories
Blends	Fusion of two words	Nouns Adjectives Non-finite verbal forms
	Words are clipped	
	Graphemic or phonemic overlapping	
	Inferability of meaning	
	Pronounceability	

Table . Summary of the characteristics of blends.

2.3. Acronyms

Acronyms are the third minor method of word-formation. Quirk defines them as “words formed from the initial letters of words that make up a name.” (1997: 1581) According to Bauer an acronym is “a word coined by taking the initial letters of the words in a title or phrase and using them as a new word.” (1983: 237)

The two authors we are following in our classification differ as regards the pronunciation of acronyms. Quirk (1997:1581-2) speaks of two types of acronyms. The first one comprises those in which the letters are read as a sequence and they are called “alphabetisms”. The second one is made of those which are pronounced as a word. Nevertheless, Bauer (1983: 237) thinks that the only possibility for acronyms is to be pronounced as words.

(37) "Travelers to Europe may be perplexed about how to recover the value-added tax, or **V.A.T.**" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 2)

As examples of acronyms we could have "V.A.T." (37), which means "Value-Added Tax". This acronym takes us to one of the questions of unpredictability because we never know which parts of the collocation would be taken to form an acronym. (Bauer 1983: 237) This problem is solved by Quirk (1997: 1582) by putting in his classification two different classes, depending on whether letters represent full words or they are just letters of words.

(38) "Secretary of state Madeleine Albright's comment [...] badly misstates the proper role of the **U.S.** armed forces" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 4)

(39) "Then, they'll all return to the **UK** to work on their new album" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 4)

Acronyms are very frequently used instead of the full names of countries or groups of countries, such as "U.S." (38) used for "United States" or "U.K." (39) for "United Kingdom".

(40) "They took up soccer (**i.e.** football) recently." (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 3)

(41) "Acne-prone skin: Use an oil-free, noncomedogenic (**a.k.a.** won't clog pores) formula." (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 16)

Acronyms can also be used for connecting words in speech, such as "i.e." (40), which stands for "id est", even though it would be read as "that is". In this example, it is noticeable that a non-English word has been used to form the acronym. Another example of a connector would be "a.k.a" (41) which means "also known as". Both examples would be as well examples of alphabetism, as they are both read as sequences of letters.

(42) "His fate will be determined by some 25 wavering **G.O.P.** moderates" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 18)

(43) "He advocated a West German pullout from **NATO's** military structure" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 27)

Politics is one of the fields where more examples are found. In this case, acronyms are mainly used to name political parties, such as "G.O.P." (42), which stands for the American "Grand Old Party"; or organisations, such as "NATO" (43), which means "North Atlantic Treaty Organisation".

(44) "But just as Asia is expected to be stabilizing and recovering sometime in 2000, the **Y2K** problem is going to hit" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 36)

(45) "I find it disgusting that some \$96 billion is being squirted into space, when the same investment in alternative clean fuels, **AIDS** research, disaster relief in Central America is needed" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 4)

(46) "All-male vocal groups are all over the charts and all over **MTV**" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 51)

(47) "Babely Brian plays Ben, the cocky, unofficial leader of his multi-ethnic group of adopted siblings on the Saturday morning **TNBC** show One World" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 53)

(48) "After Johnny and Denise performed Especially For You live on Children In Need the **BBC** was apparently "flooded with calls" requesting a copy of the single" (*Smash Hits*, 16 Dec. 1998: 3)

(49) "**JFK** establishes the do-gooder organization Peace Corps" (*Teen*, Jan. 2000: 64)

(50) "Olivia took her unique handmade bags to trendmeister Steven Alan, who decided to sell them in his ultrahip downtown-**NYC** store" (*Seventeen*, Jan. 2000: 26)

Acronyms are also used for important events of the time, such as "Y2K", (44), which was used for the "Year 2000 Keyboard", and which is also important because of the use of numbers inside an acronym. This acronym originally belonged to computer language but it was extended to the whole Year 2000 problem. They are also used to describe nowadays diseases, such as "AIDS" (45), meaning "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome". Acronyms stand as well for television channels, no matter

whether they are American or English. Examples of this are “MTV” for “Musical Television”, “TNBC” for “Turner National Broadcast Company” and “BBC” for “British Broadcast Company” (46-48). One important difference between clippings and acronyms is that it is very common to make acronyms out of a proper name. The most famous case is “JFK” (49) for “John Fitzgerald Kennedy”, but we can also highlight “NYC” (50) for “New York City”.

As regards the spelling of acronyms the only thing to be remarked is the difference in spelling depending on whether the letters are separated by dots or not. We do not think there is a settled rule for this. We would rather say that this use of the dot depends on the commonness of the acronym.

(51) "A small **CIA-FBI** team collected intelligence on him by parking itself at what agents call the "zero line" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 35)

All the acronyms explained above are nouns, except for the two connectors. Nevertheless, although they seem to be sequences of letters they behave as proper nouns that can modify another noun, such as “TNBC” (47), because it is modifying “how”. The same way we could join two nouns to form a premodifier, we can join two acronyms, as in “CIA-FBI” (51) which is modifying the noun “team”. “CIA” is the acronym for “Central Intelligence Agency” and “FBI” is the one for “Federal Bureau of Investigation”. Moreover, the same way any other noun would do, acronyms can have the possessive “-s”, such as in “NATO’s” (43).

(52) "... In early December when all 11 euro-zone central banks cut rates in concert before the **E.C.B.** officially assumes control of monetary policy on Jan. 1" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 27)

(53) "Mary Bono, right, with Lindsey Graham, was cast by the **G.O.P.**" (*Time*, 21 Dec. 1998: 21)

As regards the grammatical function, once again, acronyms can occupy any place where there can be a noun. This way we can have acronyms in the subject place, such as “E.C.B.” (52), which is the subject of the verb to “assume”. The acronym “E.C.B.” means “European Central

Bank”. In the function of object we can have “V.A.T.” (37), which is the direct object of the verb “recover”. And, finally, we can have acronyms following a preposition, such as “G.O.P.” (53) after the preposition “by”.

Below we can find a summary table of all the previously mentioned characteristics of acronyms:

Phenomenon	Pronunciation		Types		Usage	Spelling	
Acronyms	Letters read as a sequence	Letters read as a word	Letters represent full words	Letters are taken out from different parts of the word.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - proper names: persons, countries, brands... - connecting words - political life: events, parties... - current important issues 	Use of dots	No use of dots

Table . Summary of the characteristics of acronyms

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, as we have said at the beginning of the article, English is a very productive language, and we have tried to show the behaviour of three of the minor methods through which new words can be formed in the language. These processes are clippings, blends and acronyms, and they have a main characteristic in common, which is their informality, even though acronyms can be considered to belong to a more standard register of the language. They are also very unpredictable, as this kind of processes has no settled rules to know how they work, although they are very common in the language. In this article, we have tried to propose a set of traits which attempt to describe the behaviour of this type of new words. Nevertheless, further research is needed in order to establish a consistent typology of new word formation methods, as well as to identify their context of use. We have studied them as one of the characteristic of informal modern English, which seems to be proved by the high amount of examples found in magazines aimed for young people, who are supposedly the most frequent users of informal language. We have not

showed in this article all the examples found throughout our research but only the most illustrative ones, which we have attempt to present as a means to understand the behaviour of these new and unpredictable words.

NOTES

¹ Examples will be provided at the beginning of each type of word formation method, and when explained they will be referred to by using the number between brackets. Bold type has been used in each example to highlight the important words, although it does not appear in the original publications from which the examples have been obtained.

² Although it will not be considered here a classification criterion, pronunciation is an important feature when categorising blends. According to López Rua (2004: 66), there are different degrees of phonic integration depending on the extent to which the constituents that form a blend are fused.

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