

## Psycholinguistic Experiments in the Processing of Ukrainian Blends

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Recent years have witnessed an interesting linguistic phenomenon in Ukraine: as a creative response to key historic events, people build new words. A number of such neologisms are blends, i.e. words formed by merging two or more source words (SWs), as in (1) and (2).

- |                  |            |         |  |             |             |
|------------------|------------|---------|--|-------------|-------------|
| (1) Kaputin      | >kaput     | Putin   | (2) minrarium                              | >min(istry) | (te)rarium  |
| 'Kaputin'        | 'defeated' | 'Putin' | 'minrarium'                                | 'ministers' | 'terrarium' |
| (defeated Putin) |            |         | (treacherous ministers compared to snakes) |             |             |

Blends are formed in pursuit of a certain effect (e.g. to persuade or amuse) and will be effective only if the addressees recognise the SWs and understand the meaning of the blend [4-6].

Even though the processing of Ukrainian blends has not been studied to date, research on blending in English provides us with some insight into the processing of blends. First, when blends are presented visually in isolation, SWs of English overlap blends, i.e. blends SWs of which share a homophonous sequence (as in (1)), are easier to identify than SWs of substitution blends, i.e. blends in the SWs of which inner edges are clipped (as in (2)) [1,6]. Second, when blends are presented visually in context, SWs of English blends of both structural types are identified successfully and meanings of the blends are interpreted correctly [4,5]. One of the experiments discussed here examines whether the above findings hold for Ukrainian. In addition, I will study the processing of blends presented in auditory modality in a semantic priming study.

Experiment 1 addressed the following research questions: (i) Do Ukrainian speakers recognise SWs in blends when they are exposed to these blends in written text without time constraints? (ii) Does recognition of SWs depend on the structural type of a blend? (iii) Do speakers compose a blend's meaning from the (fragments of) meanings of its SWs? The subjects were asked to decompose blends of both structural types into words and to provide the definitions of the blends. The results reveal that when blends are presented in the written text, Ukrainian speakers succeed in recognising SWs of blends of both structural types and in interpreting their meaning based on the meanings of their SWs. These findings show that the insights regarding the processing of blends in English hold for Ukrainian.

Experiment 2 addressed the following research questions: (i) Do speakers of Ukrainian recognise SWs in Ukrainian blends during auditory processing of blends in context? (ii) Does the structure of a blend affect the recognisability of SWs? In this semantic priming experiment, the subjects were exposed to recordings of sentences containing blend primes and asked to perform a lexical decision task at the offset of each sentence. The reaction time to the targets was measured, which led to the analysis of the interaction between the following factors: semantic relatedness of the target to one of the SWs of a blend prime (related vs. unrelated) and the structure of the blends (overlap blends vs. substitution blends). The results of this experiment showed that when blends are presented aurally, Ukrainian speakers recognise their SWs, but only when those are overlap blends, rather than substitution blends.

The study fills many gaps in our knowledge of word processing and blending: it reveals that processing of blends greatly depends on their structure and modality of presentation. It provides insights into processing of spoken blends, which has not been done before. The study presents previously unknown facts about blends in Ukrainian, a language in which blending is virtually unstudied [2,3]. It also reveals how blends can be a potentially powerful tool in articulating critical ideas in a persuasive and amusing way.

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## References

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