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Romanian speakers' processing and understanding of lexical blends and blend-related formations

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Lexical blending, i.e. the process of forming new words by fusing together at least two words and clipping at least one of the source-words, has almost never been discussed in Romanian linguistics, as if the process did not exist. Nevertheless, empirical observations of present-day Romanian indicate an increased productivity of lexical blending under the current global English influence. To test how Romanian native speakers process and understand lexical blends, and to try to find the reasons why Romanian lexical blends are currently used, we designed a questionnaire containing Romanian blends identified in a corpus of present-day online Romanian press. Our questionnaire-based analysis suggests that Romanian native speakers are able to recover the structure of the blends they are exposed to, and sometimes even grasp their meaning without previous exposure. Moreover, subjects understand the process implied by lexical blending, even if it is not taught in schools or universities. Our overall analysis also shows that our 73 subjects, students at the University of Bucharest, believe lexical blends and blend-related formations are used for their brevity and for pragmatic reasons.

KEYWORDS: lexical blending, word-formation, Romanian, processing and understanding, English influence.

1. Introduction: Lexical blending in Romanian

The results of a questionnaire-based investigation into Romanian speakers' processing and understanding of lexical blends are presented in this article. Up to now, lexical blends have hardly ever been discussed in Romanian linguistics, as if the process did not exist. Nevertheless, as lexical blends do occur in Romanian, especially in advertising and journalese (see below), the process can be studied by looking at how Romanian native speakers process and understand lexical blends and blending-related formations, and by looking for the reasons that underlie their use.

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Lexical blending has sparked a vivid debate over the past years in linguistics, due to its non-rule-governed-but-not-random nature (an overview in Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022). Apart from some unanimously recognised examples, such as *brunch* < *breakfast* + *lunch*, linguists seem to disagree as to what is and what is not a blend, based on (usually conflicting) morphological, semantic or phonological criteria (see Renner *et al.* 2012). We embrace a more inclusive prototypical approach (López-Rúa 2004, Renner 2023), according to which blending involves the fusing of (at least) two source-words, and the loss of at least one part of one of the source-words.

The current growing interest in lexical blending is motivated by its increasing productivity in many languages: in English, the number of blends appears to double every 50 years (Mattiello 2019); the current global influence of English has triggered an increase in lexical blending productivity in Italian (Cacchiani 2016), Polish (Konieczna 2012), Dutch (Hamans 2021), Bulgarian (Stamenov 2015), and Romanian (Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022), among others.

Bauer (2012: 12) claims that "some blends arise as speech errors, others as deliberate or unconscious ways of expanding the vocabulary". Labelling the two categories "blend errors" and "blends in word-formation", Kubozono (1990: 2) suggests that the former has little creative power, therefore blend errors are lexicalised less than the latter. Most studies dedicated to English lexical blending discuss only deliberate blends (e.g. Ronneberger-Sibold 2006, who accepts only deliberate creations as blends) or hardly ever mention the distinction. However, in Romanian linguistics, the opposite has happened: most studies dedicated to lexical blending discuss the so-called 'contamination' situations, and deal only with more or less lexicalised slips of the tongue, in which two (near-)synonyms are fused together, as some of them entered the language and are recorded in dictionaries (an overview in Moroianu & Vasileanu 2019), e.g. *brostac* 'green frog' < *broască* 'frog' + *brotac* 'green frog' (where both source-words are clipped and merged, and the *-oa-* diphthong is reduced to *-o-* in a regular phonetic change). Only recently, deliberate blends have been recorded in a few papers, the novelty of the subject leading to terminological confusion, authors using different terms to designate lexical blending: *telescopare* 'telescoping' (Răuțu 2010), *fuzionare* 'fusion' (Popescu 2015), or *cuvinte-valiză* 'portmanteau words' (Roibu 2020). A more comprehensive corpus-based study (Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022) discusses the diffusion and the characteristics of present-day Romanian lexical blends, showing that Romanians do borrow and adapt international blends under the English influence, such as *infodemie, covidiot, plandemie* (see Table 1), and even more so during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. They are also creating expressive new blends, mostly nonce words, e.g. *educratiță* (ironic) 'education' < *educație* 'education' + *cratiță* 'saucepan'. Many such autochthonous

creations are in use, e.g. *corporatrist* 'corporate employee with no personal life' < *corporatist* 'corporate employee' + *trist* 'sad', but international blends are more frequently used.

There are situations when a lexical blend occurs frequently and thus becomes a model for further blends. For instance, *workaholic* < *work* + *alcoholic* has been attested since 1947 in English, and its extensive use in the 1950s-1970s led to the creation of other formations: *tobaccoholic* (first attested in 1954), *sugarholic* (1955), *chocoholic* (1961), with *-(a/o)holic* becoming increasingly productive (Mattiello 2018). Currently, OED registers *-(a/o)holic* as a suffix. This shows that a splinter, i.e. a non-morphemic word part that helps the formation of new blends, may acquire morphemic status over time by combining with various bases, a diachronic process with intermediate stages (Lehrer 2007, Mattiello 2018). Following Norde & Sippach (2019), we will call the not-yet-affix form a 'libfix', although this term is used mainly to describe splinters recurring in jocular formations. For us, libfixes are combining forms in the making, in the sense that they are added to various bases, like bound morphemes, but they have not lost completely their connection to the source-words from which they were clipped. Our data (see Section 4.2) support this interpretation.

The corpus analysis (Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022) and our empiric observations suggest that blends are on the rise in present-day Romanian mainly due to the English influence. Being mostly used in marketing and humour press, and in ephemeral formations, most of them may go unrecorded in the literature. Although a minor word-formation process as compared to compounding and affixation, which is preferred in Romanian, lexical blending is definitely a salient phenomenon and the reasons why speakers come up with such formations may shed some light on the mechanisms underlying the process. In trying to understand how, and mostly why, lexical blending occurs, we have turned to an experimental approach, following Lehrer (1996) and Connolly (2013), and created a complex questionnaire to study how Romanian native speakers perceive and understand lexical blends.

2. The questionnaire

In order to understand the process of lexical blending, observational, direct interviews would be of great help, i.e. asking people why they have just created or used a blend formation or how they understood it in a particular context. The former is possible especially in speech situations, but such cases would also explain slips of the tongue that usually do not enter the language and do not gain word status. When it comes to established lexical blends, such an approach is less attainable and there are reasons that make it impossible,

i.e. it is almost impossible to know exactly how a lexical blend such as *brunch* first appeared in the language or who coined it; in other cases, especially in the case of written (nonce) blends, authors could be contacted for clarification, but again, some might have forgotten what triggered the blend when they first coined it.

One possible solution to learn more about the reasons that trigger lexical blending is studying people's perception and understanding of lexical blending.

We have designed a questionnaire that reflects our two main research questions:

(a) how do people process and understand lexical blends? As Kemmer (2003: 71) claims that blends "are cognitively linked to pre-existing words which are co-activated when the blend is used", our subjects should turn to the source-words when decoding blends.

(b) why do people use lexical blends? What type of communicative function(s) are fulfilled by this specific type of word formation process?

2.1. Stimuli

Our stimuli were selected from a list of 324 blends, extracted manually from a present-day Romanian corpus of approximately 60,000,000 words, made up of online texts spanning over the last two decades, a yet unpublished resource whose development is supervised by Anabella-Gloria Niculescu-Gorpin, and also from the authors' perusal of the online press in 2020-2021, mostly humorous magazines and daily newspapers, e.g. <hotnews.ro>, <digi24.ro>, <timesnewroman.ro>. Most of the 324 blends were nonce words, i.e. words created on a particular occasion, which disappear once that particular event has ended, therefore do not enrich the vocabulary (Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022). Moreover, since most blends are recent, non-standard formations, they could not be attested in larger Romanian corpora to establish their frequency, making the stimulus selection somewhat exploratory. We selected 15 blends (see Appendix 1) used in the online press and on social media at the end of 2021 when the data were collected, reflecting the then most important topics and ongoing debates, mostly related to the pandemic.

The 15 items represent the major sources of Romanian blends. More concretely, we selected 4 unadapted and 6 adapted borrowings, and 5 autochthonous blends. Borrowed blends were coined in another language prior to their occurrence in Romanian, whereas autochthonous blends have been formed from two Romanian words, independently of any external model. We further divided the borrowed blends category into unadapted and adapted blends. We labelled 'unadapted' those blends that wholly retain their original spelling and pronunciation, thus obviously flagging their foreign origin. These

blends observe the current Romanian norm on borrowings (see DOOM 2021), i.e. original spelling preservation.[1] Adapted borrowings, such as *dramedie* and *infodemie*, have been modelled in Romanian after the pre-existing words *comedie* and *epidemie/pandemie*. Our subjects' responses support the distinction between the two classes of loan blends (see below, Section 4.1).

As blending and libfixing are two related processes (Norde & Sippach 2019), we added 5 words coined with libfixes. We will also discuss libfixes here since, whatever the current status of *-gate*, *-holic* and *-exit* (see Mattiello 2018), they originated in blending and thus are of interest to our research. The libfixed formations have been extracted from the same sources and are both borrowings and autochthonous words.

Six fillers were added to distract attention. The stimuli are presented in Table 1 and the sentences the subjects were exposed to in Appendix 1.

TYPE	BLEND	ETYMOLOGY
Unadapted borrowed blends	*edutainment*	Eng. *edutainment* < *education* + *entertainment*
	sexting	Eng. *sexting* < *sex* + *texting*
	webinar	Eng. *webinar* < *web* + *seminar*
	yogilates	Eng., Sp. *yogilates* < *yoga* + *pilates*
Adapted borrowed blends	*covidiot*	Eng. *covidiot* / Ro. *covid* 'covid' + *idiot* 'idiot'
	democratură	Fr. *démocrature* / Ro. *democrație* 'democracy' + *dictatură* 'dictatorship'
	dramedie	Eng. *dramedy* / Ro. *dramă* 'drama' + *comedie* 'comedy'
	infodemie	Eng. *infodemic* / Ro. *informație* 'information' + *epidemie* 'epidemic'
	netichetă	Eng. *netiquette* / Ro. *net* 'internet' + *etichetă* 'etiquette'
	sexercițiu	Eng. *sexercise* / Ro. *sex* 'sex' + *exercițiu* 'exercise'

Autochthonous blends	*covridog* 'a hotdog in pretzel dough'	Ro. *covrig* 'pretzel' + *hotdog* 'hotdog'
	crocobaur 'monster; microbe'	Ro. *crocodil* 'crocodile' + *balaur* 'dragon'
	loviluție 'state coup disguised in a revolution'	Ro. *lovitură (de stat)* 'state coup' + *revoluție* 'revolution'
	teleoltean 'person from the Teleorman county'	Ro. *teleormănean* 'person from the Teleorman county' + *oltean* 'person from the Olt region'
	țuicomicină (jocular) 'plum brandy'	Ro. *țuică* 'plum brandy' + *streptomicină* 'streptomycin (antibiotic)'
Libfixed formations	*biciholic* 'addicted to biking'	Ro. *bici* (< *bicicletă* 'bicycle') + *-holic* (< *alcoholic*)
	netaholic 'netaholic'	Eng. *netaholic* < *net* + *-aholic* (< *alcoholic*)
	Roexit 'Romania's withdrawal from the EU'	Ro. *România* + *-exit* 'withrawal from the EU' (< *exit*, coined after *Brexit*)
	shopaholic 'shopaholic'	Eng. *shopaholic* < *shop* + *-aholic* (< *alcoholic*)
	Udreagate 'political scandal involving E. Udrea'	Ro. *Udrea* 'name of a politician' + *-gate* (< *Watergate*)

Table 1. Stimuli and their etymology.

For the moment, we will only mention (see an in-depth analysis in Section 4) that the etymology of the adapted borrowed blends in Table 1 reflects one of the main interesting findings of our research: words such as *dramedie* or *infodemie* were initially blended in English, not in Romanian, but Romanian native speakers recognise their internal structure and consider them the result of blending the Romanian equivalents, thus offering a Romanian etymology when asked. In the case of *covidiot*, it is the stress that indicates a full assimilation, since the stressed vowel in Romanian is the second *o*. As shown below (Section 3), the internal structure of the blends is more salient than their actual external etymology.

New words are not used without a context, but embedded in utterances, so our stimuli appeared in (almost) real occurring contexts: we clipped or rephrased sentences from the corpus to make them autonomous and short

enough for a questionnaire. The meaning of the stimuli was not entirely deductible from the context alone (see Appendix 1).

2.2. Task

Each participant saw a sentence containing the target word in capitals, and was then asked to provide answers to four questions: Q1 'Have you ever heard/read the word before?', Q2: 'What does the word mean?', Q3: 'How do you think this word appeared?', Q4: 'Why do you think the author used it?'. Q4 allowed multiple answers: (a) 'There is no other way in Romanian to convey the meaning'; this answer implies that the word is necessary for communication; (b) 'It's shorter than the other words with the same meaning'; this answer implies the idea of brevity and economy; (c) 'This is how people around him/her speak', implying that the word is a sociolect marker; (d) 'To be funnier', implying, among others, an expressive function of the stimulus; (e) 'To catch the reader's attention', thus having, among others, a pragmatic function, and (f) 'Other', where the subjects could write their own reason. Demographic information was collected at the end of the questionnaire, i.e. 'age', 'occupation', 'self-assessed level of English', 'frequency of English use', 'contexts in which they used English' (multiple-choice).

The questionnaire was administered online, was self-paced and anonymous.

2.3. Subjects

The questionnaire was administered to students at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Faculty of Letters. It was completed by 73 subjects, aged 19-50 (mean 23.5), 5 men and 68 women. According to their self-description, 44 were undergraduate students, 13 MA students, 8 PhD students, 6 employed, 1 unemployed, 1 businessman. According to their self-assessed level of English, 57 were advanced and 16 intermediate; 60 subjects used English on a daily basis.

3. Data processing and results

The answers to the first three questions are summarised in Table 2 and Figure 1. In this section, we will briefly discuss how the data were processed and how answers were categorised, as well as the main results.

Since Q2 and Q3 had open answers, i.e. subjects were allowed to write in whatever they wanted, we had to manually code the answers. Q4 was a multiple-choice question, allowing more than one answer, but if subjects felt

the blend was used for a different reason than the five we provided, they could also add their own answers.

TYPE	ITEM	Q1 HEARD/READ	Q2 DEFINED	Q3 ETYMOLOGY
Unadapted borrowed blends	*edutainment*	8.22%	45.21%	52.05%
	yogilates	31.51%	73.97%	94.52%
	sexting	87.67%	90.41%	76.71%
	webinar	98.63%	93.15%	82.19%
Adapted borrowed blends	*sexercițiu*	15.07%	54.79%	63.01%
	infodemie	17.81%	50.68%	71.23%
	netichetă	17.81%	39.73%	50.68%
	democratură	24.66%	42.47%	42.47%
	dramedie	35.62%	79.45%	89.04%
	covidiot	57.53%	71.23%	58.90%
Autochthonous blends	*loviluție*	16.44%	24.66%	26.03%
	teleoltean	16.44%	32.88%	32.88%
	țuicomicină	35.62%	52.05%	2.74%
	crocobaur	71.23%	89.04%	60.27%
	covridog	89.04%	75.34%	75.34%
Libfixed formations	*Udreagate*	5.48%	23.29%	20.55%
	biciholic	10.96%	84.93%	57.53%
	netaholic	21.92%	69.86%	60.27%
	Roexit	42.47%	67.12%	71.23%
	shopaholic	87.67%	98.63%	84.93%
	Mean	39.73%	62.95%	58.63%

Table 2. Answers to Q1 'Have you heard/read the word before?' (the percentage indicates an 'yes' answer), Q2 'What does the word mean?' (the percentage indicates correct definitions), Q3 'How did the word appear?' (the percentage indicates correct etymologies).

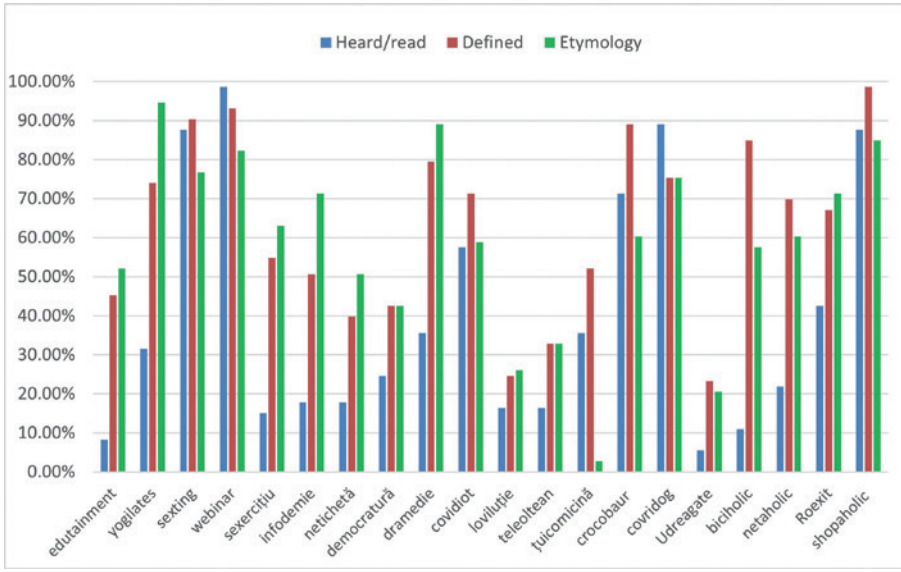

Figure 1. Answers to Q1, Q2, Q3.

Even if some stimuli scored pretty high in Q1 'Have you ever heard/read the word before', for example *webinar* scored 98.63% and *covridog* 89.04%, the overall analysis indicates that the stimuli were rather unfamiliar to our subjects: on average, only 39.73% of our subjects had read or heard the stimuli before being exposed to the questionnaire (see Table 2). This finding makes our study even more interesting, as it allows an analysis of how Romanian native speakers process and understand lexical blends they had not previously encountered.

For Q2, 'What does the word mean?', only the answers that accurately and fully described the meaning of the lexical blends were considered correct. Sometimes, the meaning was only partially described, e.g. *covridog* 'a hotdog in pretzel dough' was defined as 'a sort of hotdog'. It is highly probable that subjects knew the exact meaning, but as this could only be inferred from their answers, we decided to mark such answers VAGUE and counted them separately. Percentages for Q2 show that even if most subjects had not heard/read the blends before (Q1), on average 62.95%, defined them correctly, that is almost twice as many as for Q1.

Q3, 'How do you think this word appeared?', was formulated not to bias subjects towards a particular etymology. Some subjects called the stimuli 'compounds' or 'inventions', as they did not know the exact term; nevertheless, all answers that clearly stated the source-words in any of the answers

and/or mentioned the language of origin (in the case of borrowings) were counted as correct. Other subjects mentioned the source-words when answering Q2, and did not repeat them for Q3; these answers were also taken into account. This decision is also backed-up by one of our objectives, i.e. to see whether source-words are co-activated during blend processing, so it was less significant whether the subjects actually used the specific source-words in answering Q2 or Q3.

Were an etymology debated in the literature, all plausible explanations were marked as correct. For example, Ro. *crocobaur* 'monster; microbe' was most likely formed out of *crocodil* 'crocodile' and *balaur* 'dragon', but the second source-word could also be *dinozaur* 'dinosaur' as in the Eng. *crocosaurus* (Zafiu 2021). Ro. *infodemie,* a blend of *information* and *epidemic,* is the adaptation of Eng. *infodemic*. In English, the word precedes the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, but it has been used only during the last three years in Romanian, so answers combining *informație* 'information' and *pandemie* 'pandemic' were accepted as correct since the splinter *-demie* is the same. Answers that contained a word closely related to the officially acknowledged source-word were also marked as correct, e.g. for *teleoltean* 'person from Teleorman county, bordering the Olt region', we accepted as correct answers those that contained *Teleorman* + *oltean* 'person from the Olt region', *Teleorman* + *Olt*, besides the normal answer *teleormănean* 'person from Teleorman county' + *oltean* 'person from the Olt region'.

Answers mentioning 'invention', 'compound', but not providing the exact source-words were marked VAGUE and counted separately. However, such vagueness does not necessarily imply that the stimulus was opaque, but it may point to the fact that subjects did not feel they needed to provide the source-words. This may be considered an inconvenience generated by our phrasing of the question, but we did not want to prime the subjects by directly asking them to tell us which are the words making up the stimuli. Going back to *covridog* 'hotdog in pretzel dough', one subject defined it as 'hotdog' (coded VAGUE) and described its origin as 'a mixture of Romanian and English words'. Our intuition is that the subject must have known the exact Romanian and English words, but since he did not provide them, his answer to Q3 was coded VAGUE as there was no direct proof of the co-activation of the two source-words. Therefore, the figures in Table 2 are somehow minimal, as they reflect only the clear-cut cases; we are sure that more subjects did recognise the source-words, but did not spell them out entirely.

Libfixed formations are a special case, i.e. people offered different possible etymologies that correspond to different stages of the morphemisation with no clear-cut borders (model blend, analogical blends, morpheme formation), so answers that suggested blending, affixation or analogical formations after a model blend were marked as correct. For *shopaholic*, answers such as

shopping + *alcoholic*, *shopping* + *-aholic*, or 'after *workaholic*' were all included in the analysis (see Section 4.2).

Overall, even if the answers to Q1 show that most subjects had rarely come across the stimuli before (mean = 39.73%), they were able to guess the meaning of the word (mean = 62.95%) and its origin (mean = 58.63%). The difference between the scores of Q2 and Q3 is mainly due to *țuicomicină* (ironic name for 'plum brandy' < *țuică* 'plum brandy' + *streptomicină* 'streptomycin'): most subjects suggested a blend formation, most of the time mentioning an antibiotic/a medicine as the second source-word, but not a specific one. Since there is an accepted etymology for this word in Romanian literature, we only marked as correct those answers that made reference to it. Moreover, some subjects alluded to the source-word *sex* for *sexting* and *sexercițiu*, but did not write it, probably being reluctant to use the word in an academic environment; therefore, allusive answers were not marked as correct.

4. Processing and comprehension (Q1-Q3)

A more in-depth, per-group and per-item analysis may give further insights into the processing and comprehension of blends and libfixed formations, therefore the two categories are discussed separately.

4.1. Autochthonous vs international blends

As stated above, for borrowed blends, the answers to Q3 counted as correct included the indication of the language of origin and/or the blend structure. Table 3 below indicates the number of subjects who identified the language of origin, on the one hand, and the source-words of the blend, on the other hand (and the percentage of the total number of subjects). Certain subjects indicated both, so we counted their answers in both categories. The second column comprises answers which identified the English source-words, as well as the Romanian correspondent, e.g. for *edutainment*, some students identified *education* + *entertainment*, whereas others *educație* + *entertainment*; both answers were considered correct.

		Borrowing		Blend structure	
		n.	%	n.	%
Unadapted borrowed blends	*sexting*	40	54.79%	25	34.25%
	edutainment	19	26.03%	33	45.21%
	webinar	25	34.25%	36	49.32%
	yogilates	3	4.11%	69	94.52%
Adapted borrowed blends	*netichetă*	11	15.07%	30	41.10%
	democratură	0	0%	31	42.47%
	sexerciţiu	6	8.22%	42	57.53%
	covidiot	4	5.48%	43	58.90%
	infodemie	4	5.48%	47	64.38%
	dramedie	3	4.11%	65	89.04%

Table 3. International blends/borrowings: number and percentage of subjects who identified the language of origin and the blend structure, i.e. the source-words.

The figures in Table 3 suggest that, except for *sexting*, the structure, i.e. the source-words, was more salient than the origin of the blends, even for unadapted blends, whose borrowing status is obvious. The lower score of *sexting* may also be explained by the fact that the word *texting* is only infrequently used in Romanian.

For the adapted borrowings, the external origin was only identified by a few subjects. No subjects recognised the external origin of *democratură*, the only word of French origin; it seems that, when asked about *democratură*, our subjects re-blended the Romanian source-words (Ro. *democraţie*, Ro. *dictatură*), unconsciously calquing the French structure rather than thinking the blend was borrowed as a whole. Both hypotheses may be correct, and only a (diachronic) analysis of real contexts in which the blends appear could shed some light on which was first, but this is not our intention here. In fact, this situation occurs for other cases of adapted borrowings.

In Table 4, only the structure of international blends was retained and compared to autochthonous blends. It seems that the structure of at least some Romanian autochthonous blends is opaquer than that of international ones.

		Blend structure	
Unadapted borrowed blends	*sexting*	25	34.25%
	edutainment	33	45.21%
	webinar	36	49.32%
	yogilates	69	94.52%
Adapted borrowed blends	*netichetă*	30	41.10%
	democratură	31	42.47%
	sexercițiu	42	57.53%
	covidiot	43	58.90%
	infodemie	47	64.38%
	dramedie	65	89.04%
Autochthonous blends	*țuicomicină*	2	2.74%
	loviluție	19	26.03%
	teleoltean	24	32.88%
	crocobaur	44	60.27%
	covridog	55	75.34%

Table 4. Number of subjects who identified the source-words and the percentage / total number of subjects.

Țuicomicină (ironic) 'plum brandy' < *țuică* 'plum brandy' + *streptomicină* 'streptomycin' (Stoichițoiu Ichim 2005: 139) scored lowest in autochthonous blends: 17 subjects could tell that the splinter *-micină* comes from the name of a medicine, actually the name of the active substance (a less familiar, specialised word), but they could not name it. This might have happened because streptomycin is no longer widely used, and our subjects, mostly young people, have never heard the word. Moreover, medicines lately have commercial names and are not named after the active substance. The blend *țuicomicină* is pretty old and thus has become opaque for our young subjects. However, even when removing this outlier word from the data analysis, the average score for source-word identification for autochthonous blends (mean = 39.45% with *țuicomicină*, 48.63% without it) is lower than the ones for international blends (55.82% for unadapted blends, 58.90% for adapted ones, as indicated in Figure 2).

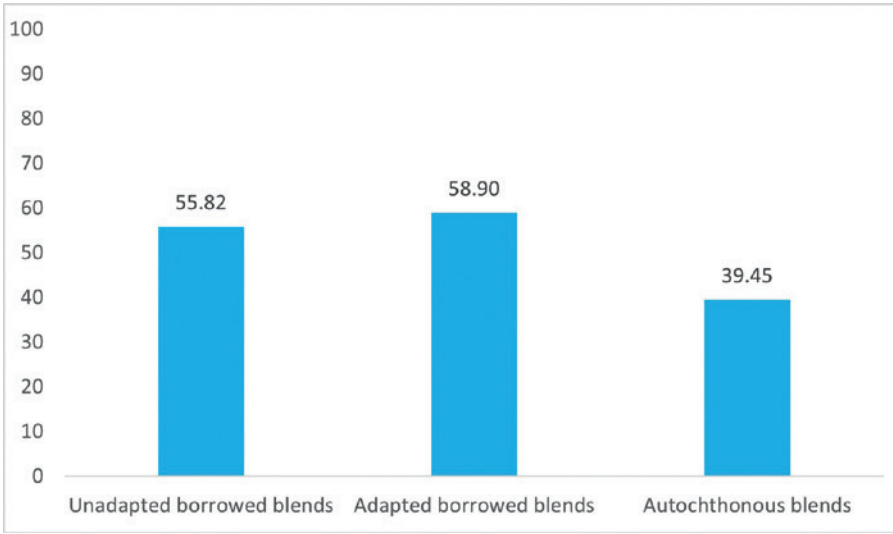

Figure 2. Average comprehension of blend structure for each type.

The difference between Romanian and international blends could have actually been higher, as for international blends some subjects only indicated the English origin as a sufficient answer for Q3, maybe considering that the source-words were not worth mentioning.

Another autochthonous blend that posed problems to our subjects was *loviluție* 'state coup disguised as a revolution' < *lovitură (de stat)* 'state coup' + *revoluție* 'revolution'. Three subjects thought that the first source-word was Eng. *love* and glossed the word accordingly, e.g. 'a period of passionate love', 'something dealing with love and evolution', 'the revolution of love'. We may speculate that, when dealing with an unfamiliar and somehow opaque blend, people will attempt to decipher it by making appeal to its context and co-text, as well as to their encyclopaedic knowledge. Interestingly, for these subjects, English was more salient in this context. The reasons could be many, but two probable causes are (i) students use English a lot and (ii) the language in which blending occurs most frequently is English (cf. Renner *et al.* 2012: 1). Both support the idea that the English influence has had an impact on Romanian blending, as shown by both the literature on blends and the corpus data (see Section 1). This connection seems to be also supported by our subjects' responses.

Going back to the autochthonous blends, *teleoltean* did not score high at all, but the structure of *crocobaur* and *covridog* was pretty transparent. Overall, the data in Table 4 suggest that international, almost exclusively English

blends, are more transparent than the autochthonous ones. As we only tested 5 stimuli from the latter category, further testing is needed with many more stimuli to confirm this initial finding; for the time being, we can only say that previous corpus research shows that international blends are the more widespread blends in Romanian (Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022).

Overall, our analysis shows that, even if our subjects knew the stimuli only in 41.55% of cases, they were able to define them (61%), explain their etymology (58.54%) and retrieve their two source words (51.60%) in a larger proportion (see Figure 3).

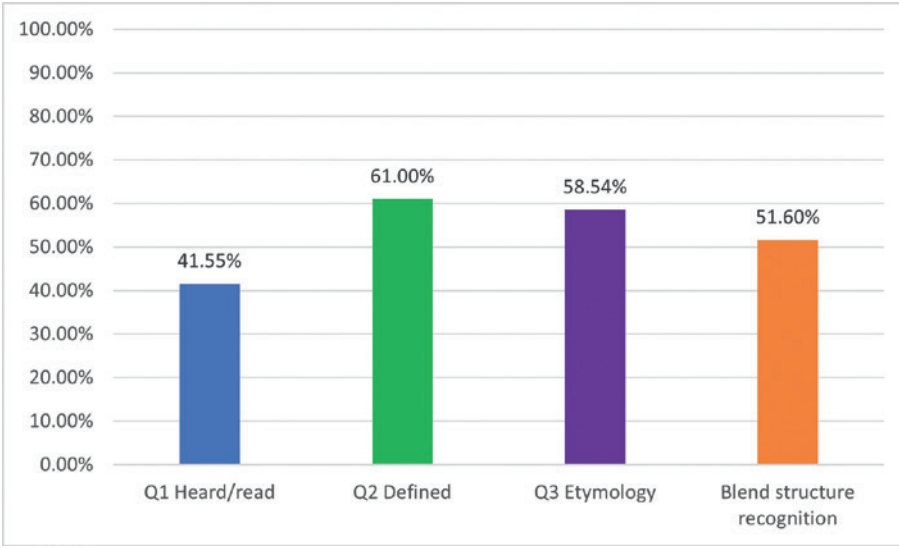

Figure 3. Averages for correct answers for all blends Q1-Q3 + structure.

4.2. Libfixed formations

The libfixed stimuli comprised both borrowings (*netaholic*, *shopaholic*) and autochthonous formations (coined from an autochthonous source-word with a borrowed libfix, e.g. *biciholic*, *Roexit*, *Udreagate*).

As shown above (see Section 1), libfixes originate in blending. Mattiello (2018) discusses the evolution of Eng. *-aholic* 'addicted to…' and *-exit* 'withdrawal from the EU', showing how a model blend, e.g. *workaholic* and *Brexit*, or even a series of model blends, triggers a (large) number of analogical formations, mostly nonce words, with the same splinter that behaves like a combining form or an affix. Such formations have a 'secreted meaning': *-aholic*

was clipped from *alcoholic* 'addicted to alcohol', but it retains only part of the meaning of the source-word, that of 'addicted'; *-exit* 'withdrawal from the EU' has a narrower meaning than its source-word *exit* (Mattiello 2018). The origin of libfixes is complicated and involves many stages and many entities: libfixes are connected to their source-words, but also to one or more model blends, which were also used to decode their meanings (see Table 5).

Figure 4 represents a contrastive overview of the answers for Q1-Q3 for blends and libfixes which suggests the latter are more easily understood than blends, despite the subjects being less exposed to them. A possible explanation could be the fact that libfixes have a more affix-like behaviour, their meaning being more predictable.

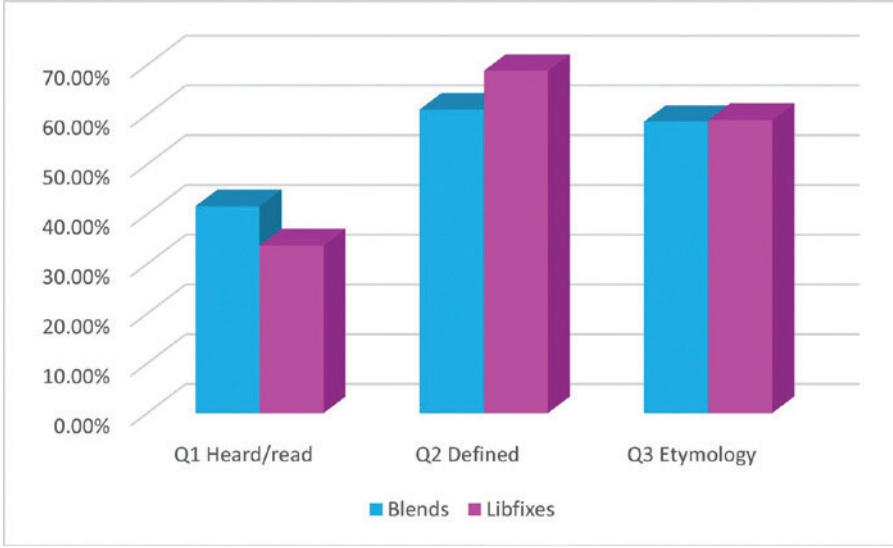

Figure 4. Blends *vs* libfixes.

Table 5 represents a more fine-grained analysis of the libfixed stimuli from our experiment, formed with three libfixes, *-aholic* (< *alcoholic*), *-gate* 'scandal' (< *Watergate*) and *-exit* (< *exit*). As libfixes are really complex and display a bundle of features, and since our subjects felt the need to provide a lot of information for these stimuli when answering the questions, we analysed their answers along four categories: AFFIX, when subjects indicated a bound morph (and sometimes called it an affix, as this is the most common type of bound morph in Romanian); BLEND, when subjects indicated two source-words, out of which one was the libfix source-word (e.g. for *biciholic*, they indicated *bicicletă* 'bicycle' and *alcoholic* or even Ro. *alcoolic*); ANAL-

OGY, when they indicated an analogy with an already-existing word, a model blend, since the limited or extended analogy is part of a libfix genesis (e.g. for *biciholic* subjects mentioned *workaholic*); ANGLICISM, when subjects indicated that the final part was of English origin. These answers were counted separately, even if one subject mentioned more than one characteristic, and percentages are calculated against the total number of subjects. This is why there is a difference between the totals in Table 5 and the etymology column for libfixes in Table 2, should one compare them.

	AFFIX		BLEND		ANALOGY		ANGLICISM	
	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%	n.	%
biciholic	18	24.66%	14	19.18%	13	17.81%	18	24.66%
netaholic	18	24.66%	13	17.81%	6	8.22%	18	24.66%
shopaholic	11	15.07%	12	16.44%	4	5.48%	46	63.01%
Udreagate	4	5.48%	11	15.07%	3	4.11%	4	5.48%
Roexit	0	0%	21	28.77%	40	54.79%	6	8.22%

Table 5. The origin of libfixed formations according to our subjects.

The answers reflect the different degrees of morphemisation of the three libfixes. For instance, *-aholic* was considered an affix in all 3 formations by more people than the other two libfixes, with *-exit* not being clearly identified as such by anyone (which was to be expected, as it corresponds to an existing word). Thus, it is obvious then that even in Romanian, *-aholic* is more advanced on the path to morphemisation than the rest.

The libfix *-gate* seems to be more closely connected with its source-word, and less familiar to our subjects, as the scores for *Udreagate* are pretty low (this could also be due to the fact that Elena Udrea is no longer a public figure and most students were teenagers at the time of the scandal).

Roexit appears to be mostly comprehended by analogy with the model blend *Brexit*. Moreover, the subjects never considered the second element, *exit*, a bound form (they never used a hyphen when writing it), but a free word, and they glossed it in Romanian as '*ieșire*'. In fact, 4 subjects wrongly defined *Roexit* as 'exit from Romania': they identified the source-words correctly, but could not figure out the meaning of the blend, and they did not connect the word to the model blends *Grexit* and *Brexit*.

The data for our libfixed stimuli in Table 2, graphically represented in Figure 5 below, show that our subjects' exposure to these stimuli was pretty low. Nevertheless, a high percentage of subjects correctly identified their

meaning and origin (except for *shopaholic*, which had a slightly higher score for familiarity than for etymology). For instance, only 10.96% of our subjects knew the word *biciholic*, but 84.93%, glossed it correctly and 57.53% explicitly provided the two source elements for its etymology. However, as stated above, Q3 percentages are minimal, as only answers that spelled out the source-words were considered correct. Except for *Roexit* (see below), the highest correct percentages are found for Q2, i.e. our subjects knew the meaning of or were able to provide a correct definition for the stimuli. Again, we believe that such findings suggest that our subjects were also aware of the stimulus structure, even when they did not clearly state it.

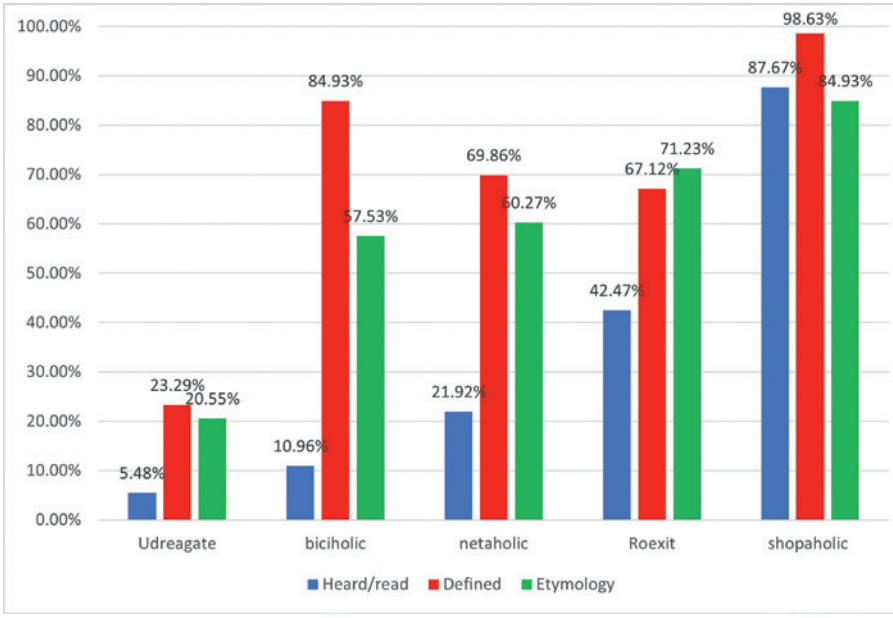

Figure 5. Answers to Q1-Q3 for libfixed formations; percentages.

5. Why do people use blends (Q4)?

Considering our subjects' previous exposure to the stimuli (Q1), the analysis has been mainly concerned so far with how well Romanian native speakers were able to correctly grasp the meaning of the stimuli (Q2), and to recover their etymology and structure (Q3), thus focusing on blend comprehension and processing.

But we are also interested in trying to find out some of the reasons that triggered blend formation and usage. As we could not record blend formation in action and immediately ask subjects why they used them (this would be indeed an ideal scenario), we asked our subjects to tell us why they thought the stimuli were used in the sentences, i.e. Q4. As stated above, our subjects could choose more than one answer and even add their own comments. Table 6 summarises the total number of answers to all stimuli, in decreasing order.

A note on the data analysis. There were 29 answers for which subjects did not write anything, so they were coded as 'unspecified', and 68 marked as 'other' as subjects added extra comments, besides the existing stimuli, comments that did not influence the analysis.

Q4: WHY DO YOU THINK THE AUTHOR USED THE STIMULUS?	TOTAL ANSWERS TO ALL STIMULI
It is shorter than the other words with the same meaning	474
To catch the reader's attention	458
To be funnier	414
There is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing	289
This is how people around him/her speak	240
I do not know	76
Other	68
Unspecified	29

Table 6. Q4. Total number of answers to all stimuli in decreasing order.

Overall, the answer '[The stimulus] is shorter than the other words with the same meaning' was the most frequently chosen, supporting the idea that brevity is a key element of lexical blending. Considering the fact that humans are efficiency-driven creatures, people produce and use lexical blends because they are shorter than the two initial source-words.

The second most chosen answer was 'To catch the reader's attention', which implies that blends are seen as important cues for processing, as their presence directs the audience towards information that speakers consider important; lexical blends are thus 'catchy', salient for the audience.

The third in line is 'To be funnier', underlining the idea that lexical blends are most often seen as playful creations, triggering not only the attention of their audience, but also making them smile. Somehow, besides their informational value, lexical blends, especially nonce ones, have a powerful pragmatic function, communicating the attitudes and the state of mind of the

user. Moreover, they are there to affect the audience, to modify them somehow, most often in a positive way. Irony, sometimes sarcasm, and playfulness are all features of lexical blends.

The least chosen answers were 'There is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing' (with a score almost half that of the first answers) and 'This is how people around him/her speak', suggesting that only some lexical blends fill a void in the vocabulary and that peer pressure is not the main factor for which people use this word-formation process. The overall analysis indicates that processing and pragmatic factors are the main reasons for which people use lexical blends.

Q4 analysis was also fine-grained along the categories considered for the other questions, namely UNADAPTED and ADAPTED BORROWED BLENDS, AUTOCHTHONOUS BLENDS and LIBFIXED FORMATIONS, as seen in Tables 7-10. The answers are arranged in the order they appeared in the questionnaire. In boldface, the most chosen answer, in underlined script the second, and in italics the third.

ANSWER	*EDUTAINMENT*	*SEXTING*	*WEBINAR*	*YOGILATES*	TOTAL
To be funnier	10	3		7	20
It is shorter than the other words with the same meaning	22	28	**38**	**38**	126
This is how people around him/her speak	13	*22*	28	10	73
To catch the reader's attention	**33**	17	9	*20*	79
There is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing.	*15*	**38**	*26*	22	101
I do not know	4		1	2	7
Other	2	4	4	4	14
Unspecified	2			1	3

Table 7. Answers to Q4 for unadapted borrowings.

Unadapted borrowings (Table 7) are mainly used because they are shorter than the two source-words (126 answers) and because there is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing (101). Thus, speakers tend to borrow words because they think/feel that their mother tongue does not provide sufficient means to lexicalise a particular reality. Of course, paraphrasing or using the source-words would be available options for Romanian, but correlated with their brevity, people find borrowed lexical blends the best choice.

If each stimulus is taken separately, there are slight differences (*webinar* and *yogilates* rank first for brevity, *sexting* for filling a gap in the Romanian lexicon and *edutainment* for the pragmatic function), but the overall image supports our general findings above, i.e. that brevity is an important feature of lexical blends. Yet again, the pragmatic function ranks third.

ANSWERS	*COVIDIOT*	*DEMOCRATURĂ*	*DRAMEDIE*	*INFODEMIE*	*NETICHETĂ*	*SEXERCIȚIU*	TOTAL
To be funnier	**42**	*15*	12	10	8	*16*	103
It is shorter than the other words with the same meaning	*18*	18	**39**	21	23	**31**	150
This is how people around him/her speak	12	8	9	8	12	11	60
To catch the reader's attention	26	**34**	23	**36**	**26**	26	171
There is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing.	7	14	*15*	*15*	*17*	12	80
I do not know	1	7		5	7	5	25
Other	5	4	3	3	3	1	19
Unspecified	1	2	1		4	2	10

Table 8. Answers to Q4 for adapted borrowings.

Pragmatic reasons are the most important in using adapted borrowed blends (Table 8 above) as 'to catch the reader's attention' ranks first (171 answers) and 'to be funnier', third (103); brevity ranks second (150). The findings for adapted borrowed blends are pretty similar to those for autochthonous blends (see Table 9 below), which are also used mainly for pragmatic reasons (197 'to be funnier' answers and 96 'to catch the reader's attention' answers) and, yet again, brevity scores third (60 answers). Interestingly, only *covridog* scored the most under 'there is no other way in Romanian to

say the same thing', which was to be expected, as the word describes a new type of Romanian pastry, and a paraphrase would not work at all for a commercial product. Answers for '*loviluție*' are also interesting, as both questions related to the pragmatic function received the highest number of answers, i.e. 22. Overall, except *covridog*, all the other 4 autochthonous words are used, according to our subjects, because the speaker/writer wanted to be funnier, i.e. they are marking pragmatically the context and as such, they also catch the reader's attention.

ANSWER	*COVRIDOG*	*CROCOBAUR*	*LOVILUȚIE*	*TELEOLTEAN*	ȚUICOMICINĂ	TOTAL
To be funnier	17	**60**	**22**	**42**	**56**	197
It is shorter than the other words with the same meaning	*21*	0	11	*13*	15	60
This is how people around him/her speak	8	*8*	*10*	10	10	46
To catch the reader's attention	22	22	**22**	19	*11*	96
There is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing.	**27**	0	11	1	6	45
I do not know	0	0	*10*	5	3	18
Others	9	3	2	3	0	17
Unspecified	0	1	4	3	1	9

Table 9. Answers to Q4 for autochthonous formations.

Last, but not least, Table 10 contains the answers for Q4 for libfixed formations. Although brevity scored highest (138 answers for 'It is shorter than the other words with the same meaning'), pragmatic reasons were chosen most (206 answers), with 112 for 'to catch the reader's attention' and 94 for 'to be funnier'. Taken separately, some of the stimuli scored higher for brevity and others for pragmatic reasons, but these were the most important reasons for their use. Fourth comes 'there is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing'. Out of the 5 libfix formations, 3 are formed in Romanian, but the libfixes are of English origin, so borrowing these not-yet-affix formations is also efficiency-driven and linked to brevity, i.e. Romanian native

speakers could have used periphrases to talk about a *biciholic* or about *Udreagate*, but appealed to a more efficient and concise way.

ANSWER	*BICIHOLIC*	*NETAHOLIC*	*ROEXIT*	*SHOPAHOLIC*	*UDREAGATE*	TOTAL
To be funnier	**35**	*17*	11	6	25	94
It is shorter than the other words with the same meaning	27	**36**	**33**	**33**	*9*	138
This is how people around him/her speak	*19*	16	5	*16*	5	61
To catch the reader's attention	15	24	25	18	**30**	112
There is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing.	10	12	*15*	18	8	63
I do not know	5	4	7	1	*9*	26
Other	3	2	3	7	3	18
Unspecified		2	1		4	7

Table 10. Answers to Q4 for libfixed formations.

6. Conclusions

Since lexical blending has been an almost inexistent topic in Romanian linguistics so far, and since cases of lexical blending have been on the rise in Romanian lately under the influence of English (Vasileanu & Niculescu-Gorpin 2022), we have created a questionnaire to test how Romanian native speakers perceive and understand lexical blends and blend-related formations; more specifically, we were interested in seeing whether our subjects recognised their structure and the processes underlying them and also in finding some possible reasons why people use them.

Our data analysis suggests that lexical blending seems to be both well understood and processed by our subjects, and recognised as a word-formation process, even if our subjects did not know exactly its name, i.e. very few people actually said anything directly related to lexical blending, but many identified the source-words and realised that some parts of one of these words were clipped.

To establish if there was a direct link between exposure to a particular blend and understanding it, we first asked our subjects to tell us whether they

had seen the blends before, then to define them and then to explain their structure. To cover the complexity of Romanian lexical blending, we chose as stimuli unadapted and adapted borrowed lexical blends, as well as autochthonous ones; we also added a few libfixed formations, i.e. words coined with a bound form originating in blends, but which has not yet acquired a morphematic status (e.g. *-gate*).

Overall, the data analysis indicates that lexical blends and libfixed formations are understood even if they had not been previously encountered, and their processing is generally triggered by their (perceived) structure. However, in some cases and for some subjects, decomposing a blend was not enough to infer its meaning. For *infodemie* 'infodemic', some subjects indicated *informații* 'information' and *pandemie* 'pandemic' as the source-words, but did not see the intended head-modifier relation between the two and thus did not infer its intended meaning, glossing it as 'fake news about the pandemic', instead of the intended 'an epidemic/pandemic of information'.

Another misleading element in recovering the meaning of blends is the polysemous nature of the source-words. For *netichetă* 'netiquette', some subjects correctly indicated the source-words *(inter)net* and *etichetă*, but misinterpreted the latter as meaning 'tag', not 'etiquette'. Such mistakes suggest that subjects first tried to process the blend by decomposing it into its source-words, but this was not always enough to recover the intended meaning of the word. Nevertheless, the overall results show that our subjects understood the stimuli pretty well, even if they were not very familiarised with them, thus supporting the idea that other elements such as lexical blend transparency and source-word recoverability are more important in understanding and processing lexical blends. Moreover, the stimuli were embedded in shortened sentences adapted from authentic contexts found in our corpus. We believe that the minimal context has also helped disambiguation, at least for some subjects. In real-life communicative situations that presuppose a continuous exchange of information between the participants, context plays an even greater role, as it provides other cues for processing and understanding (Niculescu-Gorpin 2022).

Since we also wanted to identify some reasons that may trigger lexical blending, but could not directly observe people when they created lexical blends, we asked our subjects to choose among some possible reasons for which people may use lexical blends. The data analysis in Section 5 shows that brevity and pragmatic reasons are the main triggers for using lexical blends, irrespective of the type of lexical blends analysed. For unadapted borrowed lexical blends, e.g. *edutainment* or *sexting*, the second most chosen answer was 'there is no other way in Romanian to say the same thing', emphasising the fact that our subjects felt that Romanian lacked a single word to describe the reality the blends referred to, and thus borrowed them.

The previously acknowledged relation between the pervasive English influence and the increased productivity of lexical blending in several languages (see Section 1) seems to be supported by our data as well, since international blends are understood and recovered more easily than autochthonous blends. Also, most of our stimuli are either (un)adapted from English or are somehow based on English models (see the case of libfixed formations).

To sum up, our questionnaire-based analysis suggests that Romanian native speakers, at least the young generation exposed to English on a daily basis, are usually able to correctly recover the structure of the lexical blends presented (51.60%), even if they are not necessarily familiarised with them, and that in most cases they can also recover their meaning (61%). Moreover, according to our subjects, lexical blends are used for brevity and pragmatic reasons, supporting the idea that lexical blends are efficiency-driven formations used to attract the reader's attention towards some important information in a text.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[1] However, borrowings such as *edutainment* and *webinar* are morphosyntactically adapted, as they receive Romanian inflection markers when used in sentences, such as the enclitic definite article: *edutainmentul, webinarul*. Thus, we used the term 'unadapted' for brevity, and to distinguish these blends from the class of 'analogically adapted borrowings', e.g. *dramedie*, *sexercițiu*.

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Appendix 1

The stimuli used in the questionnaire. The sentences were abbreviated from the real contexts in which the stimuli appeared in our corpus.

BLEND	SENTENCE	APPROXIMATE TRANSLATION
crocobaur < *crocodil* 'crocodile' + *balaur* 'dragon'	*Spera să nu ia alți* CROCOBAURI *din spital.*	(S)he hoped not to get other BUGS from the hospital.
shopaholic < Eng. *shopaholic* < *shop* + *-aholic* (< *alcoholic*)	*Aglomerația din malluri e greu de suportat chiar şi pentru* SHOPAHOLICI.	Crowdy malls are hard to bear even for SHOPAHOLICS.
sexting < Eng. *sexting* < *sex* + *texting*	*Liceenii fac* SEXTING.	High-school students are SEXTING.
infodemie < Eng. *infodemic* / Ro. *informație* 'information' + *epidemie* 'epidemic'	INFODEMIA *e cel puțin la fel de gravă ca boala covid-19.*	INFODEMICS is as dangerous as covid-19.
Roexit < *România* + *-exit* 'withrawal from the EU' (< *exit*, coined after *Brexit*)	*Voiculeț este susținător al* ROEXIT.	Voiculeț supports ROEXIT.
webinar < Eng. *webinar* < *web* + *seminar*	*Aceste teme urmează a fi dezbătute în cadrul unui* WEBINAR.	These topics are to be discussed in a WEBINAR.
covridog < *covrig* 'pretzel' + *hotdog* 'hotdog'	*La Simigeriile Petru găsiți și* COVRIDOG.	At Petru's [a chain of pretzels and pastry shops], one can also get PRETZELDOGS.
netichetă < Eng. *netiquette* / Ro. *net* 'internet' + *etichetă* 'etiquette'	*Elevii discută despre siguranța în mediul online și* NETICHETĂ.	High-school students discuss online safety and NETIQUETTE.
biciholic < *bici* (< *bicicletă* 'bicycle') + *-holic* (< *alcoholic*)	*Îmi place să merg cu bicicleta, dar nu sunt* BICIHOLIC.	I like to ride a bike, but I am not BICIHOLIC.
covidiot < Eng. *covidiot* / Ro. *covid* 'covid' + *idiot* 'idiot'	*Luna trecută,* COVIDIOȚII *au umplut plajele din Florida.*	Last month, COVIDIOTS filled up Florida's beaches.

sexerciţiu < Eng. *sexercise* / Ro. *sex* 'sex' + *exerciţiu* 'exercise'	*Aceste* SEXERCIŢII *au fost puse la punct pentru a ajuta la întărirea muşchilor din jurul platformei pelviene.*	These SEXERCISES have been created to help strengthen the pelvic floor muscles.
teleoltean < *teleormănean* 'person from the Teleorman county' + *oltean* 'person from the Olt region'	*Cât îl mai lăsăm pe* TELEOLTEAN *să-şi bată joc de noi?*	For how long do we all let the TELEOLTEAN keep mocking us?
netaholic < Eng. *netaholic* < *net* + *-aholic* (< *alcoholic*)	*Se pare că femeile sunt mai* NETAHOLICE *decât bărbaţii.*	It seems women are more NETAHOLICS than men.
Udreagate < *Udrea* 'name of a politician' + *-gate* (< *Watergate*)	UDREAGATE *seamănă cu un scenariu de film.*	UDREAGATE looks more like a movie script (than anything else).
democratură < Fr. *démocrature* / Ro. *democraţie* 'democracy' + *dictatură* 'dictatorship'	*Multe state care au fost democraţii s-au transformat în* DEMOCRATURI.	Many democratic states have turned into DEMOCRASHIPS.
edutainment < Eng. *edutainment* < *education* + *entertainment*	EDUTAINMENTUL *va deveni esenţial în învăţământ după pandemie.*	EDUTAINMENT will become of outmost importance after the pandemics.
dramedie < Eng. *dramedy* / Ro. *dramă* 'drama' + *comedie* 'comedy'	*Actorii Sebastian Stan şi Denise Gough joacă într-o* DRAMEDIE.	The actors Sebastian Stan and Denise Gogh play in a DRAMEDY.
ţuicomicină < *ţuică* 'plum brandy' + *streptomicină* 'streptomycin (antibiotic)'	ŢUICOMICINA *l-a lăsat fără permis!*	PLUM BRANDY left him without his driving licence!
yogilates < Eng., Sp. *yogilates* < *yoga* + *pilates*	*Dacă doriţi să scăpaţi de stres, Carlos vă propune cursurile de* YOGILATES.	If want to get rid of stress, Carlos recommends his YOGILATES classes.