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A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO HYPERBOLIC BLENDS[1]

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Abstract: This study explores hyperbolic blends, a creative word-formation technique, through cognitive modeling. It categorizes these blends into intensifying and non-intensifying sets with unique features and functions. The analysis demonstrates systematicity in blend creation and interpretation, confirming hyperbole's prevalence in language and reasoning. The research also refines lexical blending definitions, recognizing nonce formations as potential blend components.

Keywords: cognitive modeling, hyperbole, lexical blending, metaphor, metonymy, splinter.

1. Introduction

Lexical blending, an additive and subtractive word formation category at the intersection of morphology and phonology, exhibits great structural and conceptual diversity, leading to different and even divergent definitions of the phenomenon. Our definition is all-encompassing, as it includes phenomena such as shortened or abbreviated combinations (e.g., *breathalyzer < breath + analyzer*; Plag 2003: 122), overlapping blends (e.g., *sinema < sin + cinema*), or intercalative blends (e.g., *slithy < lithe + slimy*). Lexical blending is a creative, innovative, and productive mechanism (cf. Peña, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c) through which a lexical item is created by combining two (or more) base words, with at least one being shortened (Peña 2022c: 276). The segmentation of the constituents of blended

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words does not follow regular morphological standards. It should be also noted that one of the constituents of blends might be a nonce formation rather than a well-defined lexical item (e.g., *kerjillion < kerj + b/million*), which further attests to the great heterogeneity displayed by this word-formation technique.

A matter of concern for scholars is whether lexical blending is regular and predictable or creative and unpredictable. However, as argued by Beliaeva (2019), creativity does not necessarily lead to lack of regularity. Researchers like Bauer, Beliaeva, and Tarasova (2019), Wulff and Gries (2019), and Peña (2022b; 2022c) provide extensive evidence of predictable constraints on the morphological, phonological, and semantic features of blends. In this context, to contribute to the existing literature on the semantic regularity of lexical blending, a detailed analysis of a specific group of blends, hyperbolic blends, is conducted in this proposal from the perspective of cognitive modeling (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2022; Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera 2014). The following objectives are addressed: (i) to lend further support to the widely-acknowledged belief in the growing potentiality and popularity of lexical blending as a word-formation technique; (ii) to account for and motivate the regular nature of a group of blends from a semantico-pragmatic perspective; to this end, a two-fold classification of hyperbolic blends is proposed, and the functions these sets of blends fulfill are spelled out; and (iii) to further substantiate the claim for the central role played by figurative language in everyday language and thought. Hyperbolic blends have not been addressed systematically to date. This study fills this gap.

To provide a detailed qualitative analysis of the topic at hand, a corpus of 500 hyperbolic blends has been collected from the webpage of neologisms of the University of Rice, the new words section of the *Cambridge Dictionary* online, and the NOW Corpus. The examples illustrating the use of blends in context have been retrieved from the NOW Corpus, the *Cambridge Dictionary* online, and the *Urban Dictionary*.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: section 2 provides a summary of some of the main approaches to the study of blends from a semantic perspective. Section 3 focuses on the study of hyperbole from the perspective of cognitive modeling. Section 4 is dedicated to the analysis of the data. Finally, section 5 summarizes our main findings and suggests future research avenues.

2. A semantico-pragmatic approach to lexical blending

There are various ways in which the components of blended words can be semantically related, as discussed in Adams (1973), Algeo (1977), Barrena Jurado (2019), and Gries (2012).

Adams (1973) organizes blends into syntactic classes, such as nominal, adjectival, and verbal blends, and further classifies them semantically. For example, nominal blends can be instrumental (e.g., *automania < automobile + mania*), compositional (e.g., *plastinaut < plastic + astronaut*), locative (e.g., *daymare < day + nightmare*), or resemblance-based (e.g., *bombphlet < bomb + pamphlet*).

Algeo (1977) distinguishes between syntagmatic blends, which fuse co-occurring lexical items (e.g., *Amerind < American + Indian*), and associative or paradigmatic blends, which arise from mental associations between lexical units. Most associative blends combine semantically-linked units, such as synonyms (e.g., *swellegant < swell + elegant*) or co-hyponyms (e.g., *smog < smoke* and *fog*).

Gries (2012) identifies five main categories of semantic connections between blend constituents: synonymy, co-hyponymy, contractive (e.g., *scifi < science + fiction*), frame relation (e.g., *riverscape < river + landscape*), and others (antonymy, derivation, etc.).

Barrena Jurado (2019) focuses on blends with the *splinter -gasm*. A splinter is a fragment of a word that is used to form a blend. This author classifies the blends containing this splinter into cause-and-effect blends (e.g., *yogasm < yoga + orgasm*), experiencer blends (e.g., *fangasm < fan + orgasm*), coordination blends combining two sensations (e.g., *dreamgasm < dream + orgasm*), and adjectival blends (e.g., *fakegasm < fake + orgasm*).

Peña (2022c) offers a detailed study of English lexical blends in terms of cognitive modeling in order to account for the semantic relationship between the constituents of a set of blended words. Her corpus of analysis spans five years, from 2016 to 2020. This contribution, however, does not specifically focus on hyperbolic blends. In this proposal, we address this particular kind of blend, and the corpus of analysis has not only grown in size but has also been updated.

3. Hyperbole: a brief overview

In this section, we offer a brief outline of hyperbole, paying special attention to the analysis of this figurative use of language from the point of view of the notion of cognitive modeling as treated in Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera (2014) and Ruiz de Mendoza (2021).

Hyperbole has been extensively studied in pragmatics, where it is regarded as an interpretive or non-descriptive figurative use of language involving an exaggerated clash with reality. In connection to the Gricean view of figurative language as involving a flouting of the conversational maxim of

truthfulness, scholars like Bhaya (1985), Clark (1996), and Haverkate (1990) distinguish between lying and hyperbolic language, with only the latter being socially acceptable. For example, Haverkate (1990: 103) notes that hyperbole is but "a description of the world in terms of disproportionate dimensions". As for the exaggeration ingredient, scholars like Pomerantz (1986) and Norrick (2004) differentiate between non-extreme hyperbole and *extreme case formulations* or ECFs, with hyperbole involving a scale ranging from ECFs (which consist in absolute expressions like *You are always complaining*) to mild cases. With respect to its relationship with other figures of speech, Dynel (2017) argues that hyperbole converges with metaphor, irony, and meiosis in that they all flout the maxim of truthfulness (i.e., they are overtly false). Relevance Theory emphasizes the interplay between hyperbole and other figures such as irony (Gibbs 2000; Kreuz & Roberts 1995), metaphor, and simile (Carston and Wearing 2011; Rubio-Fernández et al. 2015), challenging the assumption that metaphor can be neatly distinguished from hyperbole and meiosis. Thus, many ontological metaphors focus on a target-domain property that the source contains in a higher and more conspicuous proportion (e.g., *Her gaze gleamed with the brilliance of gold*). As for hyperbole and irony, think of the sentence *Right, exactly what I needed*, said in response to an undesirable or negative situation. The adverb *exactly* is hyperbolic in situations where absolutely accuracy is impossible to determine. Because of its hyperbolic quality, it can combine easily with irony to emphasize in an impacting way that the situation in question is not what could be expected but rather the opposite.

The cognitive perspective on hyperbole, which is consistent with most aspects of the various pragmatic accounts, discusses this figure as involving strengthening and mitigation operations on scalar concepts (Peña & Ruiz de Mendoza 2017; 2022; Ruiz de Mendoza 2020; 2021; Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera 2014; Ruiz de Mendoza & Peña 2005; Ruiz de Mendoza & Pérez 2003). The speaker employs strengthening to produce the exaggerated meaning impact, whereas the hearer utilizes mitigation when noticing the discrepancy between the speaker's utterance and the actual context. This perspective relates the cognitive mechanisms involved in hyperbole with their meaning effects. But hyperbole involves more than these two converse cognitive operations. Like metaphor, hyperbole consists of a cross-domain mapping where an upscaled conceptual representation sets up an imaginary source domain that helps reason about the target domain, a real-world state of affairs (Ruiz de Mendoza 2014). For example, in *Mary's depression is killing her* the source domain depicts the nearly impossible situation where Mary is dying of depression. The target is the real situation where Mary is having a hard time. Thinking of the real-world situation as if it was the imaginary one is a source of attitudinal inferences that allow the hearer to measure the emotional impact of an overly troubling situation. Overestimation of the severity of the situation is intended to maximize the hearer's concern over it and to encourage the hearer to sympathize or even to take action to the extent that it

is possible on account of the social convention whereby we are expected to provide comfort to those in trouble.

Hyperbolic expressions can describe situations that are either inconceivable or conceivable but unlikely. Absurd hyperbole belongs to the category of impossible or unimaginable scenarios and is similar to other figures of speech like metaphor and irony (Barnden 2020; Musolff 2017). In this regard, Barnden (2020) suggests that three scales are essential for a cognitively plausible understanding of hyperbole: the scale in question, the speaker's emotional state, and the protagonist's emotional state. This proposal suggests that to comprehensively and accurately analyze hyperbole, one must consider its interactive aspects.

4. Hyperbolic blends: classification and functions

4.1 Intensifying hyperbolic blends

Lexical blending does not always create new meanings. The analysis of the data in our corpus reveals that some hyperbolic blends do not name new realities, emotions, or reflect societal changes or new trends. Blends of this kind will be referred to as *intensifying hyperbolic blends*. Take the following examples:

(1)

  a. *Yummilicious* (< *yummy* + *delicious*) ('extremely delicious'). "*You can choose from their three yummilicious homemade sauces*" (NOW Corpus).

  b. *Gianormous*, *ginormous* (< *giant* + *enormous*) ('extremely large'). "*Apple is already busy building its ginormous cloud data center in Maiden, North Carolina*" (NOW Corpus); *gimongous* (*gigantic* + *humongous*) (used to refer to something that is particularly huge) ('extremely large, enormous'): "*How wrong they are and Jodiphur had just made one huge, gimongous mistake"* (https://www.wordsense.eu/gimongous/).

  c. *Fantabulous* (< *fantastic* + *fabulous*), *niftabulous* (< *nifty* + *fabulous*), *superbulous* (< *super* + *fabulous*), *glamfabulous* (< *glamorous* + *fabulous*) ('absolutely amazing, fabulous'): "The Incredible *(the movie) was niftabulous! I enjoyed every second of it*" (https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/45716).

  d. *Splendorific* (< *splendorous* + *terrific*), *magriffic* (< *magnificent* + *terrific*) ('amazing, awsome'). "*The Christmas decorations at the Galleria during this season are magriffic!*" (https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/45213).

  e. *Grool* (< *great* + *cool*) ('special, extraordinary'). "*…personalised Lohan videos include: wishing your pal a "grool" birthday"* (NOW Corpus).

f. *Maddenating* (< *maddening* + *infuriating*) ('causing extreme anger'). "*It is so maddenating that my History final isn't until the 18th"* (https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/45208).

The constituents of the lexical blends in (1) are semantically related through (near-)synonymy. Additionally, these blends are primarily based on extreme case formulations or ECFs, a notion already mentioned above. ECFs often stretch reality beyond what is reasonable, which is why they are likely to trigger hyperbolic uses, as seen in the examples in (1). By combining two segments of synonymous source adjectives, at least one of which is an ECF, these amplify the hyperbolic potential of a single ECF. The primary purpose of these blends is to exaggerate size, a specific quality, or an emotional reaction. *Yummilicious* stresses the extremely tasty quality of food. This blended adjective has been used to name a self-serve franchise that offers unique sweet and tart frozen yogurts. *Gianormous*, *ginormous*, and *gimongous* emphasize huge size. The second element of the blends in (1c) is the splinter *-bulous* or the full form *fabulous*, which can prompt hyperbolic meaning. This effect is magnified by the first constituent of *fantabulous*,[1] *niftabulous*, *superbulous*, and *glamfabulous*. These adjectives highlight the extremely amazing, good, or incredible nature of something. *Splendorific* and *magriffic* incorporate the final splinter *-ific*, which has undergone a process of amelioration and weakening of meaning throughout history. *Grool* also emphasizes excellence and greatness, while *maddenating* emphasizes derangement.

As noted above, these blends combine two (near-)synonyms without contributing new semantic meanings to the lexicon. Their pragmatic function is to enhance the potentially hyperbolic nature of a single ECF, aiming to draw the hearer's attention to an impossible scenario that is clarified in context. As the likelihood of the imaginary scenario decreases by accumulating hyperbolic-prone lexical items, the emotional impact of the expression on the hearer increases. In terms of relevance, which is central to cognition, processing effort should be offset by extra contextual effects (Wilson & Sperber 1994: 94-95). When applied to the interpretation of the examples in (1), processing two bases encoding the same meaning is more costly than processing one. This additional effort on the part of the addressee results in greater contextual effects.

Besides these adjective + adjective combinations, adverbs can also merge in blends such as *pre-zactly*:

(2) *Pre-zactly* (< *precisely* + *exactly*) (used to enhance someone's point).

"An ex-RAAF Uncle who serviced P-51s informed me that during the Korean War and after that, Aussie CAC-built Mustangs and their Packard Engines were sought by others (Yanks in particular)

... reason, they were the most powerful and reliable...my Uncle passed away so would need another RAAF type to confirm the story.

As opposed to the US built Mustangs with imported UK built Merlins?

Yes! Prezactly!" (NOW Corpus)

Another interesting set of blended words that do not create new meanings in the lexicon consists of noun + adjective patterns. The constituents are linked in terms of resemblance (a cognitive operation that captures similarities across concepts; Ruiz de Mendoza & Galera 2014: 93). Consider the following examples:

(3)

    a. John: We're going to the beach on Saturday!

Matt: Sexcellent! (*Urban Dictionary*)

    b. "Mmmm... this pie is sexxxcellent"

(https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/47039)

Sexcellent and its variant *sexxxcellent* are used to describe something that is exceptional, surpassing all limits. The implicit comparison underlying *sexcellent* is 'something as excellent as sex' and the multiple "xs" in *sexxxcellent* add an extra layer of intensification. This catchy lexical blend serves as the title of a song by the band Uncle Scam, which deals with singer Ischa's sexual encounter with an unknown partner. However, the connotations of these blended adjectives are not solely sexual. They apply to any situation, event, or thing whose most prominent characteristic is excellence, as seen in the examples in (3).

A prime example is the blend *heinosity*, which combines the adjective *heinous* and the noun *monstrosity* in (4) below. Monstrosities are characterized by being extremely ugly, evil, and usually large. Thus, describing a monstrosity as heinous may seem redundant, as monstrosities are inherently abominable. The adjective strengthens this trait, making the blend more expressive and appealing but does not contribute to creating a new lexical item with a distinct new meaning.

(4)

    "DS: *Heinosity is a word that I invented. It is a combination of the words "heinous" and "monstrosity". I'm the first artist to have used the word "heinosity" in a song title and record title and I am very proud of that".*

This example is part of an interview between Jon Neudorf and Derek Sherinian (DS), a singer. This singer coined the eye-catching word *heinosity* as a marketing strategy to name an album he released in North America in 2009. The hyperbolic load of the noun *monstrosity* is evident not only due to the extreme wicked nature of monsters and monstrosities but also because monsters are imaginary creatures. The characteristics emphasized in the metaphorical substratum underlying the title of this album are related to heavy music. The etymological meaning of the adjective *monstrous*, "of unnatural formation, deviating from the natural order, hideous," and "enormous, huge"[2] dates back to the middle of the 15th century and to 1500 respectively. These meanings persist to this day, with a further metaphorical twist in some contexts: BIG IS IMPORTANT. Furthermore, what deviates from the natural order (as is the case with heavy music) is considered extraordinary. Thus, the negative etymological connotations of *monster* and its derivatives (*monstrous*, *monstrosity*) undergo a process of enhancement through metaphorical reinterpretation. Moreover, as argued, the adjective *heinous* reinforces the 'wicked' feature of the noun *monstrosity* and adds an extra level of hyperbolic meaning to the blend *heinosity*.

Excess is also codified by blended nouns denoting high numbers. Take the examples in (5):
(5)
      a. *Jillion, bajillion, squillion, zillion, gazillion, kazillion, bazillion.*
      b. *Skajillion, kerjillion*: "*May she burn in hell for a million billion kerjillion lifetimes*" (NOW Corpus)

The nouns in (5) mean 'an extremely large, but not an exact, number', as in *I've told you a zillion times/zillions of times not to do that*. While the examples in (5a) are well-established blends included in dictionaries like *Cambridge* or *Merriam-Webster*, those in (5b) have not yet been incorporated into standard lexicographical products. *Skajillion* and *kerjillion* have been modeled based on the noun blends in (5a). These blends are, in fact, *hapax legomena* in the NOW Corpus, but they demonstrate the great potential of the splinter *-illion* (< *m/billion*) to fuse with other segments, yielding new blends that are highly creative and catchy. This splinter does not retain its exact original meaning in the novel blend formations it is attached to, but rather becomes more general, as it refers to an extremely large number. The additional elements of 'indeterminacy' and even 'bizarreness' are contributed by both the splinter and the first component of the formation.

In summary, the blends in (5) demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of blending as a word-formation process. The first component of these blends is a nonsensical segment that cannot be attributed to any grammatical category and does not have an identifiable semantic meaning. This contrasts with

previous definitions of lexical blending, which claim that segments of blends originate from well-defined lexical items (including abbreviations and letters) rather than nonce formations.

Other potentially hyperbolic blends are those based on the splinter *-illionaire*, which is clearly related to the splinter *-illion* and is used to designate a person who has amassed an exorbitant fortune. The blends incorporating this splinter in (6) share the meaning of an indeterminate, bizarre amount of money with the nouns denoting disproportionate wealth in (5).

(6)

    a. *Kajillionaire, gazillionaire, zillionaire, jillionaire, squillionaire, bazillionaire, bajillionaire.* "*Why did he take the job? He's already a bazillionaire*" (*Cambridge Dictionary*)

    b. *Bullionaire* (< *bullion* + *billionaire*). "*Vladimir Putin, whose wealth is unknown but has been speculated to exceed $200 billion, is another, different kind of billionaire – one with graver whimsies*" (NOW Corpus)

    c. *Ballionaire* (< *ball* + *billionaire*). "*Ballionaire is a pachinko roguelike about building the wackiest Rube Goldberg machine you can in order to make as much money as possible and meet increasing cash thresholds*" (NOW Corpus)

There is an asymmetry in the coinage of the intercalative intentional *bullionaire* in (6b) when compared to the examples in (6a). The possibility of creating the associated term *bullion* to mean a large amount of money is ruled out. First, *bullion* already exists to refer to gold or silver in the form of bars. It would be feasible to include this sense in the lexical entry of this lexeme in lexicographical products, but it could be a potential source of confusion. Second, *bullionaire* refers to a person who has become extremely rich through activities related to trading in precious metals. Thus, the semantic import of this blend differs from the ones in (6a), all of which refer to an extraordinarily wealthy person without any indication of the source of the riches. A similar explanation applies to *ballionaire* in (6c), another intercalative intentional blend that goes beyond alluding to an extremely rich person. Headedness in this example differs from the type found in (6a) and (6b). The examples in (6a) and (6b) are endocentric blends where one of the original parts (the "head") determines the overall meaning of the new word. *Ballionaire* is an exocentric blend, where the meaning of the whole is not directly derived from the meaning of its parts, as it refers to a "pachinko roguelike" that can make gamers amass a great fortune by placing triggers after each of five ball drops to pay tribute to some "Elder" beings. The game is named after two salient facts: (i) it involves playing with balls and, (ii) if successful, you can become a m/billionaire. Thus, another interesting shared characteristic of the blends in (6b) and (6c) is that emphasis is directed towards aspects of meaning that are not

indeterminate quantity and bizarreness, which are bleached or non-existent in *bullionaire* and *ballionaire*.

A conspicuous difference between the blends in (6a), on the one hand, and (6b) and (6c), on the other, is that while the former do not give rise to new lexemes in the lexicon, as was the case with all previous examples in this section, the former do create new meanings.

The hyperbolic blends discussed so far, intensifying hyperbolic blends, are characterized by the following features:
- They are used for emphasis, as they intensify the meaning of the second element of the blend.
- Exaggeration is central to the formation of these blends, making them suitable for hyperbolic interpretation. They can exaggerate size, degree, quality, or quantity.
- The main semantic relationship between the elements forming these blends is near-synonymy.
- They do not contribute to the substantial body of lexemes that represent distinct meanings in the lexicon.
- They mainly conform to the adjective + adjective morphological pattern, even though other structures are feasible to a more limited extent: adverb + adverb, adjective + noun, noun + adjective, or unknown word class + noun.
- They tend to be conceptually simple. Apart from the near-synonymy relationship held by most of these blends, the cognitive foundation underlying their production and interpretation in terms of cognitive operations is not very complex. Their comprehension does not pose many challenges. Their interpretation is straightforward compared to some of the hyperbolic blends in the following section.
- Their main pragmatic functions are humor, playfulness, and attractiveness. These blends capture the addressee's attention and arouse their interest or curiosity.

4.2 Non-intensifying hyperbolic blends
Some hyperbolic blends, rather than intensifying them, instead generate novel meanings. While still exaggerating emotions, perspectives, and circumstances, these particular blends do not serve an amplifying function.

Some nonce formations like *relationshit* and *vegevangelical* in (7) and (8) respectively can be interpreted hyperbolically:

(7) *Relationshit* (< *relation + shit*) ('a very complicated and extremely disappointing relationship'). "*If there is abuse there is no love, i'm sorry that you got caught in this relationshit... honestly, i think you should just move on alone and stay single for good until you meet the right one*" (NOW Corpus)

(8) *Vegevangelical* (< *vegetarian + evangelical*) (used to characterize a person who is a convinced vegetarian and tries to persuade other people to join this way of life). "*I feel like a vegevangelical when I try to tell you that meat is harmful to your health, since my words never seem to get anywhere*" (https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/48495)

In (7), resemblance accounts for the underlying semantic connection between the constituents of *relationshit*. Interpreting the meaning of this nonce formation requires a metaphorical reinterpretation of *shit*. The alleged similarity between the referents of the bases of *relationshit* is related to one of the main effects that "shit" can produce: repulsion, which is carried over to the domain of a love relationship.

The interpretation of *vegevangelical* should be understood in a very specific context. The term was coined by parents telling their children not to eat meat due to its unhealthy effects, while coincidentally, there was a pastor on television. Evangelicals consider it essential to spread their religious beliefs to others. Vegetarians attempting to persuade others to follow their eating habits might be compared to evangelicals. As with *relationshit*, resemblance between the two bases of *vegevangelical* underlies its interpretation.

Both *relationshit* and *vegevangelical* are hyperbolic in the examples in (7) and (8) above. The speakers exaggerate a state of affairs (by claiming that a relationship is "shit" in (7) and that a convinced vegetarian is an evangelical in (8)), which the hearers must downplay to understand the real-world situation: a love relationship is unsatisfactory and harmful in (7), and parents, characterized as convinced vegetarians, persistently attempt to persuade their children to adopt their lifestyle and stop eating meat in (8).

Other blends result from the systematic attachment of a splinter to various (parts of) source words. Our data analysis has revealed that several splinters with a metaphorical basis trigger hyperbolic readings of the resulting blends they are part of. Consider the following examples:

The final splinters *–(t)astrophe* (< *catastrophe*), *-pocalypse* (< *apocalypse*), and *-locaust* (< *holocaust*) are intrinsically negative suffix-like segments denoting impending disaster. A catastrophe

is an event that causes great and very often sudden damage, trouble, or destruction. An apocalypse can be defined similarly. Its biblical interpretation as the total destruction and end of the world is well known. A holocaust refers to a large amount of destruction, mainly caused by fire or heat, or to the killing of many people. The killing of millions of Jews by the Nazis before and during the Second World War was accordingly called the Holocaust. These lexemes and their corresponding final splinters can be used hyperbolically whenever the disaster is exaggerated for effect. They do not imply a real "end-of-the-world" situation. In fact, the hyperbolic component of these final splinters is based on a metaphorical interpretation in which any mishap or accident that is not particularly devastating or harmful is seen as a catastrophe. Furthermore, the splinters *-(t)astrophe*, *-pocalypse*, and *-ocaust* retain the intended communicative force of their corresponding bases. Let us address these three final hyperbolic splinters one by one.

Further down, in examples (9a), (9b), (9c), and (9d), the splinter *-(t)astrophe* combines with a source lexeme that expresses the cause of the catastrophe. This means that the semantic relationship between the constituents of the blends in (9) is basically cause-effect. The frame of the lexeme *catastrophe* involves "an Undesirable_event which affects the Patient negatively. No agent need be involved."[3] Interestingly enough, the first segments of (9a), (9b), (9c), and (9d) denote a non-core element of the frame 'catastrophe', the cause. On the other hand, the first portion of (9e) designates a core frame element, the patient. Santa Claus occupies the slot of the Patient inasmuch as he suffers the consequences of crowded hotels at Christmas, which makes it impossible to deliver gifts. The degree of conceptual complexity of these blends is high. In (9a), the first element, the bus, provides conceptual access to a situation in which a shortage of bus drivers caused massive cancellations and delays of buses. In (9b), the first source word of *wish-tastrophe* also activates a whole situation in which the main character of a novel, Lydia Marmalade, causes chaos after making a wish at Christmas. *Sarcasm* in (9c) also opens up a scenario in which failing to understand someone's use of sarcasm triggers an uncomfortable situation. *Boy* in (9d) is also an anchor to a whole scenario in which a failed relationship with a boy leads to disaster. In (9e), *Santa* invokes a situation where Santa's primary role as responsible for delivering gifts at Christmas is doomed to failure due to the presence of many people in hotels.

(9) *-(t)astrophe* (< *catastrophe*)

  a. *Bustastrophe* ('the chaotic situation that arose as a consequence of the departure of old bus drivers and the unsuccessful attempt of the industry to recruit new bus drivers'). "*Everyone*

will remember the bustastrophe when the trolleybuses were decommissioned and replaced with +30 years old diesels from Auckland" (NOW Corpus)

    b. *Wish-tastrophe* (title of a novel by Cariad Lloyd; it makes reference to the chaotic situation caused by Lydia Marmalade after she makes a wish at Christmas). "*When Lydia Marmalade makes a wish on the most magical night of the year, little does she know the chaos she's about to unleash. Could one simple wish start a . . . wish-tastrophe?"* (NOW Corpus)

    c. *Sarcastrophe* ('embarrassing situation that can arise when someone tries and fails to use sarcasm'). "*Todd's failed attempt at humorous sarcasm resulted in a sarcastrophe at dinner"* (https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/46850)

    d. *Boytastrophe* (a bad experience in a relationship, usually a romantic one, with a boy). "*What a boytastrophe! We went on a date, but we disagreed on everything so much that it ended only 30 minutes in!"* (https://neologisms.rice.edu/word/41769)

    e. *Santastrophe* ('a chaotic situation faced by Santa Claus when trying to deliver gifts in hotels at Christmas'). "*Airbnb: Santastrophe. Santa Claus faces comedic chaos delivering gifts in hotels in Airbnb's festive animated short"* (NOW Corpus)

In the examples in (10) below, the final splinter *-pocalypse* (< *apocalypse*) is used recurrently in the formation of hyperbolic blends. As was the case with *(t)astrophe* (< *catastrophe*), the cause is a non-core element of the frame for apocalypse. However, the first component of the blends in (10) denotes this peripheral element. The degree of conceptual complexity of these blends, especially of the first segment, varies. While the interpretation of (10a) and (10b) is reasonably straightforward, (10c) is more complex, (10d), (10e), and (10f) representing higher levels of complexity. In *robopocalypse* (10a), the first element denotes the direct cause of a potentially catastrophic situation in which robots replace humanity. In (10b), the first segment of the blend, *snow*(storm), designates a weather event that causes devastating effects. The understanding of (10c) requires more processing effort. *Cookie* provides conceptual access to a whole scenario in which third-party cookies disappear. *Cookiepocalypse* refers to the negative consequences this might bring about, especially in the way advertisers target Internet users. As regards (10d), *air* provides access to a whole scenario in which people living in Beijing in 2013 were exposed to toxic air. Smog particles in the air far exceeded the limit recommended by the World Health Organization. This was perceived as a dramatic "end-of-the world" scenario. In (10a), (10b), (10c), and (10d) causes are objects or events. In contrast, in (10e) and (10f), certain animate beings and a specific human being are respectively seen as causing an apocalyptic situation. However, these entities grant conceptual access to whole scenarios. In (10e), *Trump* conjures up a wider scenario that involves Trump's (re)election, no matter what he does, and his way of ruling the United States of America. *Trumpocalyse* conveys negative feelings towards

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Trump as a political leader, which might lead to the end of America as people knew it before Trump burst into politics. *Trumpocalypse (Restoring American Democracy)* is also the title of a book by David Frum in which the author wonders why a third of the electorate keeps trusting Donald Trump. As a title, *Trumpocalypse* is evocative. Finally, *hens* in *henspocalypse* (10f) first needs a interpretation based on the metaphor WOMEN ARE ANIMALS (HENS). This sense of the word *hen*, used to refer to women, can be traced back to Middle English. The expression *hen party*, meaning a 'gathering of women', was first recorded in 1887. The underlying reason for metaphorically speaking about women in terms of hens lies on a derogatory conception of women, who are seen as "standing out for their dopey behavior" (López-Rodríguez 2007: 27). The way hens are kept in small spaces is another feature that is carried over from the domain of hens to the domain of women. Crowded together in a tiny space, which impedes motion, makes them indistinguishable and deprives them of individuality. In the context of the film *Henpocalypse*, it is also worth noting that the five women who star in it are compared to hens in terms of the way they move around in barns. Their movement closely resembles that of women who dance and sway happily when enjoying an event like a party. In fact, the title of the film evokes a happy and playful situation in which five women gather to celebrate a wedding. This metaphorical interpretation of 'hens' as 'women' is an anchor for a situation in which these women happily enjoy a party.

(10) *-pocalypse* (< *apocalypse*)

a. *Robopocalypse* ('a future end of the world caused by robots'). "*With the advances in technology that we're seeing, many people are worried about a coming robopocalypse"* (NOW Corpus)

b. *Snowpocalypse* ('a severe winter storm'). "*The event takes place regardless of the weather, although it has been cancelled once due to a crippling winter storm dubbed "Snowpocalypse""* (NOW Corpus)

c. *Cookiepocalypse* ('the possible and gradual disappearance of third-party cookies seen as a dramatic event'). "*Google is trying to avert the cookiepocalypse for the ad tech industry, no repentance necessary*" (NOW Corpus)

d. *Airpocalypse* ('presence of dense and toxic airborne smog in many parts of Asia and South Africa'). "*While a handful of city authorities had raised the pollution warning to the highest level, Tuesday China's national observatory did so, signalling a first-ever red alert for a phenomenon that has come to be known as the "airpocalypse""* (NOW Corpus)

e. *Trumpocalypse* ('the election and presidency of Trump seen as a catastrophe, more precisely as the end of America, by some Democrats'). "*A number of wealthy tycoons have made preparations for 'Trumpocalypse' by buying property in New Zealand*" (NOW Corpus)

f. *Henpocalypse* (title of a film in which five women enjoying a hen-do face an apocalyptic situation when they discover that a sudden outbreak of crab measles threatens to wipe out humankind). "*This led him straight to the set of Henpocalypse! which saw five women headed out on a hen-do, only for the celebrations to be interrupted by the end of the world…*" (NOW Corpus)

The final splinter *-ocaust* (< *holocaust*) in (11) also denotes a sense of destruction derived from its original source word, *holocaust*, whose meaning is "a very large amount of destruction, especially by fire or heat, or the killing of very large numbers of people".[4] The splinter metaphorically reconstrues the original sense of the base word and is part of nonce formations whose first element expresses cause (11a), affected entity (11b), or even a positive event or situation (11c and 11d). The degree of conceptual complexity of these blends is high. In (11a), *alcohol* provides access to a party in which excessive alcohol consumption leads to a chaotic situation. (11b) is particularly interesting since the 'holocaustic' component is parameterized into a specific kind of catastrophic situation caused by an infectious disease like Coronavirus, which dramatically affects birds by expediting their death. In (11c) and (11d), *lolocaust* and *yolocaust*, contrast operates at two levels: (i) lexical contrast, as the two segments making up these blends involve seemingly contradictory terms when considered from a denotational point of view; and (ii) high-level contrast: these blends are to be interpreted in terms of a clash between an imaginary scenario and a real-world scenario that produces a great emotional impact on the hearer (Peña 2022b). *Lolocaust* (11c) emerges from the combination of the acronym *lol* ('laughing out loud') and the splinter *-ocaust*. The meaning of this blend is not only hyperbolic but also paradoxical and ironic. First, there is a clash between an imaginary scenario in which something completely terrible but at the same time amusing takes place and a real-world situation that depicts something that is both terrible (but not completely horrible) and fun. Second, the paradox is reinterpreted in the right context as something that causes pretended rather than authentic laughter. This is related to the ironic component. The irony stems from a fictitious scenario in which the speaker likes terrible situations and an observed scenario in which the speaker hates the situation (in the context of the example the speaker expresses his/her irritation at the long wait on the road to avoid a hurricane that never struck). The interpretation of *yolocaust* in (11d) runs along the same lines. *Yolo* is an acronym for "you only live once". It is used particularly in social media to mean that you should do exciting or enjoyable things, even if they seem stupid or a little dangerous. Here, the splinter

-*ocaust* refers to a situation in which people taking selfies in the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin express their joy. Again, we find two levels of contrast, lexical and high-level contrast. In this example, the marked scenario in which people enjoy something so harsh and mournful as the Holocaust Memorial is to be construed in the context of new trends that lead people to take selfies wherever they are, no matter how inappropriate that might be. The hyperbolic element stems from the clash between an imaginary scenario in which people enjoy the scenery where they take the selfies, the Holocaust Memorial, as if it was a funny place, and the real-world situation in which people show a blatant disregard for such a sad place as a way of amusement.

(11) -*ocaust* (< *holocaust*)

a) *Alcoholocaust* ('the panorama after a drinking party, usually resulting in a messy and filthy space full of empty bottles and trash'). "*You guys better stay around to help clean up the alcoholocaust you started last night*"
(https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=alcoholocaust)

b) *Aviocaust* ('a great disaster caused by Coronavirus or other infectious diseases that causes the massive death of many birds'). "*Christmas is coming but neither the geese, nor for that matter the turkeys, are getting fat. They are dying of Covid – sorry, bird-flu – and millions have had to be culled because of the danger of infecting humans. The price of the birdy-Christmas-dinner rises with the aviocaust*" (NOW Corpus)

c) *Lolocaust* ('a situation or event described as terrible but in an amusing way'). "*We spent twenty-two hours on the road avoiding a hurricane that never even came. What a lolocaust*" (NOW Corpus)

d) *Yolocaust* ('the joy expressed by people taking selfies in the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin'). "*He rebuked a project called "Yolocaust" meant to mock visitors for taking jubilant selfies at such reflective sites*" (NOW Corpus)

Besides these final splinters that denote catastrophe or impending disaster, there are others, based on metaphor, which express other meanings. Some examples are (12) -*zilla* (< *Godzilla*) or (13) the initial splinter *franken-* (< *Frankenstein*). The referent of the initial segment of any blended word ending in -*zilla* will be metaphorically regarded as a monster, which is obviously hyperbolic. The splinter -*zilla* is often taken by agent-like segments to denote a person who is excessively imposing, overbearing, and/or huge (Mattiello 2023: 169). Thus, the splinter -*zilla* is metonymically reinterpreted to focus on one or more of the characteristics attributed to Godzilla, a dinosaur-like

monster. In (12a), (12b), (12c), and (12d) the relevant feature is the threatening nature of the monster, while in (12e) and (12f) it is its extraordinary size.

(12) *-zilla* (< *Godzilla*)

a. *Bridezilla* ('a bride or bride-to-be who is excessively worried about the details of her wedding and is obsessive and very demanding'). "*Not every bride is a bridezilla, but if you've watched Whose Wedding Is It Anway, then you can admit there are a few psycho ones*" (NOW Corpus)

b. *Groomzilla* ('a man who is extremely demanding as regards the details of his wedding and is difficult to deal with'). "*Sally branded him a "groomzilla" as she pointed out that little things about the colour of the napkins don't matter in the grand scheme of things*" (NOW Corpus)

c. *Weddingzilla* ('a person extremely involved in planning his/her wedding, which results in unbearable behaviour'). "*Apparently, Des was a bit of a weddingzilla during the planning stages as he was all for taking to the dance floor*" (NOW Corpus)

d. *Momzilla* ('an over-involved or controlling mother'). "*Eventually, she mutates into a humungous mumzilla with pendulous breasts, who sucks her zombie-killing son Lionel back into her womb with the words, "No one will ever love you like your mother!"*"(NOW Corpus)

e. *Hogzilla* ("a giant male wild hog hybrid that was killed in 2004 in Georgia, in the United States"). "*In 2004, one of the largest hogs was found in Alapaha, Georgia. It was estimated to weigh about 800 pounds and was around eight feet long. The locals call it "Hogzilla"*" (NOW Corpus)

f. *Toadzilla* ('an extremely giant cane toad'). "*A cane toad so giant wildlife officers thought it was fake has been found in a north Australian rainforest. The "monster" specimen is six times bigger than the average toad, weighs 2.7kg, and could break a world record. Dubbed "Toadzilla", the animal was quickly placed in a container and removed from the wild*" (NOW Corpus)

(13) *franken-* (< *Frankenstein*)

The meaning of the initial splinter *franken-* also results from a metonymic reinterpretation whereby one or more characteristics of the monster Frankenstein are singled out:[5]

- Genetically modified (artificial) (as in 13a).
- Something that consists of several assembled parts, which can result in a weird object/event (as in 13b).
- Ugliness and/or weirdness (as in 13c).

- More than one of these senses, even though one of them usually stands out from the rest (as in 13d).

a. *Frankentomato* ('tomato that has been genetically modified').

b. *Frankenbite* (or *franken-edit*) ('a video extract edited together from several sources').

c. *Frankencut* ('a weird and ugly haircut').

d. *Frankencar* ('a car that is assembled from defective parts of other cars, and is thus weird and ugly').

In (12) and (13), an imaginary and (virtually) impossible scenario is set up that involves some exaggeration (in terms of size or some other characteristic) that the addressee has to scale down to understand the real-world situation. Moreover, while the blends in (12) and (13) have a naming function, in the sense that they create new members within existing categories, they also fulfill a humorous function.

The hyperbolic blends analyzed in this section are characterized as follows:

- They create new meanings (new members within already existing categories) instead of merely having an intensifying role.

- As with intensifying blends, exaggeration plays a decisive role in their formation and are thus hyperbolic.

- The main semantic relationships between the elements forming the blends are hyponymy and contrast.

- The blends mainly conform to the noun + noun morphological pattern.

- They tend to be conceptually complex. First, they are usually based on metaphor and many of them call for some metonymic elaboration.

- As in the case of intensifying hyperbolic blends, their main pragmatic functions are humor, playfulness, and attractiveness. These blends catch the hearer's attention arousing interest and/or curiosity.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper fills a gap in the study of lexical blending by providing a qualitative analysis of a previously underexplored group of blends: hyperbolic blends. Drawing on the main postulates of cognitive modeling, the study offers a semantico-pragmatic perspective of this set of blends. It has been found that hyperbolic blends are highly innovative and creative lexical items that can be divided into two main sets: intensifying hyperbolic blends and non-intensifying blends. The former are primarily adjective + adjective combinations used to intensify the meaning of the second element of the blend. The semantic relationship between the segments in these lexical items should be understood

in terms of near-synonymy. Thus, they do not create new meanings. Their interpretation is often straightforward, as they do not involve a high degree of conceptual complexity. They serve humorous purposes and are catchy. In contrast to intensifying hyperbolic blends, the second group consists of novel formations that create new members within existing categories. They mainly conform to the noun + noun pattern and the relationship between their constituents is one of hyponymy or contrast. They are conceptually complex compared to intensifying hyperbolic blends. They are usually metaphorically grounded, and many of them have to be metonymically developed. Regarding their functions, while they convey playful humor, they also serve a naming purpose.

As hyperbolic expressions, the blends in both sets involve some form of exaggeration, which is a key concept for the production and interpretation of hyperbole. These concise and creative lexical items are interpreted in terms of a clash between two scenarios: an imaginary and (virtually) impossible scenario (the source) and the real-world situation (the target). The addressee must scale down the exaggeration to understand the meaning of the blend. This clash has a significant emotional impact on the addressee.

Examining hyperbolic blends from the perspective of cognitive modeling has enabled us to further substantiate the claim that there is some semantic and pragmatic systematicity and regularity in the creation and interpretation of blends. This analysis has also contributed to supporting the claim that hyperbole, much like metaphor, is widely used in language since it is one of the ways in which we reason about the world. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the detailed study of our data has paved the way for a refinement of previous definitions of lexical blending. We have discovered that the components of blends are not necessarily well-defined lexical items included in lexicographical products; they can also be nonce formations that are playful, attractive, and creative.

This study opens up further research avenues. Quantitative and cross-linguistic studies could shed additional light on both the idiosyncratic and regular nature of hyperbolic blends. Additionally, a bigger corpus would allow for the search of more splinters that display a hyperbolic component.

Notes

[1] This blend has been studied as an intentional blend. Similarity has been found to play a relevant role in the formation of some blends. In the case of intentional blends, similarity is to be understood in terms of the extent to which the base words that are combined in a lexical blend are similar to each other in terms of characters, phonemes, and stress patterns (Gries 2004; Kemmer 2003). Here we focus on semantic similarity, the paradigmatic relationship of (near) synonymy exhibited between the constituents of lexical blends. However, phonological similarity is also displayed by some hyperbolic blends like *fantabulous* or *cashtration*, which enhances the expressive effect of these lexemes.

² https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=monstrous

³ https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fnReports/data/frameIndex.xml?frame=Catastrophe

⁴ Definition taken from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/holocaust

⁵ For a detailed study of this splinter, see Peña (2022a: 129-130)

Abbreviation

ECF(s) – extreme case formulation(s)

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