

Word of the month Blursday

What day of the week is it? For many, during lockdown, this question proved extraordinarily difficult to answer. Days seemed to merge into each other. We needed new vocabulary to describe such novel experiences. Hence, *Blursday*.

Blursday is what in linguistics is called a blend. Two words combine to create a new word. It's a well-established strategy in English – think of *brunch* (breakfast + lunch), *smog* (smoke + fog), and *motel* (motor + hotel). Lewis Carroll's Humpty Dumpty (in *Through the Looking-Glass*) called them *portmanteau words* – “two meanings packed up into one word”. They've been in the language a long time. Two lovely early examples: *foolosophy* (fool + philosophy), meaning “foolish thinking”, dates from 1592; *knavigator* (knave + navigator) – someone who claims to have made a geographical discovery that turns out to be fake news – from 1613.

But it was the 20th century, with the growth of advertising and the tabloid press, and later the internet, that produced a huge increase in the number of blends. The online world gave

us *netiquette*, *digerati*, *cybernaut*, and many more.

In last month's article, I illustrated blends using *Brexit* as the stimulus. So it's hardly surprising to see a new wave of blends arriving along with the coronavirus.

Corona itself has generated dozens of variants. You may have encountered people taking a *coronacation* at home or in the garden, *coronadodging* others in the street or shops, or looking rather unkempt as a result of a self-barbered *coronacut*. Prophets of doom talk about *coronageddon* and *coronapocalypse*. Singing to raise spirits? *Corooning*. And we live, evidently, in *coronatimes*.

Covid has been exploited in a similar way. So alongside *coronadodging* we see *covidodging*. We're advised to be *covalert* or *covigilant*, and not be *covid-iots*. Apparently many people have acquired a *covipet* – especially a *covidog* – to provide companionship during lockdown. I especially liked *coventine* – a quarantined nunnery.

The cleverest blends, I think, are those using other elements, such as *quarantini* (for the drink that keeps you going, to

relieve *quarantedium*); or the alternative, to become *quaranteetotal*. Then there's *quaranteeny* (a very mild dose keeping you at home), *quaranteaching* (while schools are closed), and the fearsome thought of a *quaranteenager*.

New behaviour has brought *elbumps* (avoiding hand-shaking), *isodesking* (for working at a distance), *ronavation* (getting on with home improvements), and *Zoombies* (what we become if we Zoom too much). And how will we talk about leaving a period of lockdown? *Locksit*, of course.

The religious world hasn't been immune to coronablending. *Coronapriests* (aka *covipriests*) have been live-streaming Masses. So have *coronabishops* (or *covibishops*). The coincidence of *vi* being shared by the disease and an Anglican minister produces *covicar*. And when Pope Francis walked alone in St Peter's Square a little while ago, I imagine I wasn't the only person to think of him as the *coronapope*.

But, come to think of it, as he is the Vicar of Christ, *covipope* would have been a much better blend.