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To commemorate its twenty-fifth year of publication, Duke Magazine asked twenty-five Duke leaders and scholars to project ahead twenty-five years and imagine what life would be like for their discipline in the year 2034. Here is my contribution:

How will American English change in twenty-five years?

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No group of adults has ever said, “We sure do like the way the kids are talking these days.” But the fact is, the way the kids are talking now will determine how English will be spoken in twenty-five years. Urban teens in Baltimore are reported to be using the construction *Peep yo* to mean *Look at this/him*. I mention this mostly because it delights me but also to make the point that innovations occur in specific places among specific groups of speakers.

If you are not experiencing delight with the Baltimore innovation but rather distaste or puzzlement, let me remind you that speakers in the seventeenth century would have experienced similar feelings upon hearing *The house is being built* (the “proper” verb form at the time being *The house is a-building*), while a sentence such as *We are being reasonable* would have been downright strange and probably unthinkable. (The construction *present progressive of “to be” + adjective* was an innovation of the twentieth century.) Will the construction *Peep yo* become a form of Standard English twenty-five years from now? Probably not. But stranger things have happened.

The word-formation process du jour in American English is blending, that is, combining two existing words to make a new word. A couple of blends formed in the Middle English period (1150 to 1500) have survived into Modern English, e.g., *scrawl* (*sprout + crawl*) and *quaver* (*quake + waver*), as well as a couple from Early Modern English (1500 to 1800), *dumfound* (*dumb + confound*) and *apathetic* (*apathy + pathetic*).

The first half of the twentieth century gave us *smog*, *motel*, and *brunch*. But the fun really starts in the last few decades. We now have *prequel*, *dramedy*, *infotainment*, and *blog*, along with *rockumentary*, *shockumentary*, *mockumentary*, and while we’re at it, *mockbuster*. We have clothes (*unitard*, *tankini*), food (*frappucino*), flavors (*strawbermelon*), pets (*labradoodle*) and even people (*Brangelina*). Blends occur in all parts of speech: *ginormous*, *geektastic*, *negatory*.

Last year, I was driving along the highway, channel surfing, and I caught a DJ saying, “We’re gonna party in the Caribbean and turn Jamaica into Boozachusetts.” My first thought was, “Aah, we’re in the Golden Age of Blends.” My second thought was of the blend that uses another part of the Bay State, namely the term *Masshole*, which is how one person from Massachusetts greets another or as an insult from a New Yorker (so I have been told).



Blends are everywhere. My YMCA not only has a gymnasium, it also has a *fitnasium*. Q: What do you call the relationship between two straight men who really like each other? A: A *bromance*, of course. And as a sign of our fusion times, I have just heard of the new religion *Chrislam*.

Two things are certain: 1) Some of these blends will become standardized and live on (I vote for *bridezilla*); and 2) in twenty-five years, some blends, particularly those of companies or brand names, will sound dated. Microsoft may become known as MC, just as GE has replaced General Electric in common parlance.

Here we come to acronyms, the other robust word-formation process that mushroomed in the twentieth century, either pronounced as words, *amphetamine* (*alpha methyl phenyl ethyl amine*), or pronounced as a sequence of letters: VCR, MSG, IUD, and BLT. Some may be pronounced both ways, as in ROTC. A slew has, indeed, come out of army talk: AWOL, RADAR, SNAFU, MIA, and GP ('general purpose' car) now spelled *jeep*.

The 1960s gave us LSD, JFK, LBJ (think: the "Initials" song from *Hair*), which has led to the slimmed-down W and now to O. Reinforced by text-messaging, the kids are talking in abbreves just as earlier generations began to speak punctuation: *He's a quote-unquote body builder slash trainer*. If you don't know what an abbreve (rhymes with Aleve) is, ask someone under the age of thirty.

So here is my prediction for a possible utterance twenty-five years from now: "Peep this. Some dude a long time ago thought the word *bridezilla* would last. Hah! Total fail. But I like it." Pause. "JK."