



Get edumacated!

“Homeric infixation is a morphological construction that has recently gained currency in Vernacular American English. People who are familiar with this construction invariably credit the TV animation series, *The Simpsons*, particularly the speech of the main character Homer Simpson, for popularizing this construction.”

(Yu, A. C. L. 2004. Reduplication in English Homeric infixation. *NELS* 34)

Many speakers of American English, particularly younger speakers, can insert the syllable “*ma*” into a word to produce a humorous variant like “edumacation” or “saxomaphone”. For many words, everyone agrees on how the “edumacated” variant should be formed, but there’s some disagreement, too.

Below, three people give what they feel are the correct “edumacated” versions of twelve words. We’ve underlined the stressed vowels of all the words; you should likewise indicate stress with underlining in your answers.

	Alan	Barbara	Chris
Alab <u>a</u> ma	<u>A</u> lamab <u>a</u> ma	<u>A</u> lamab <u>a</u> ma	<u>A</u> lamab <u>a</u> ma
cap <u>i</u> tal	<u>c</u> apim <u>a</u> ta <u>l</u>	<u>c</u> apim <u>a</u> ta <u>l</u>	<u>c</u> apim <u>a</u> ta <u>l</u>
cap <u>a</u> tain	<u>c</u> apam <u>a</u> ta <u>i</u> n	<u>c</u> aptam <u>a</u> ta <u>i</u> n	uh... i'm not sure
congrat <u>a</u> lations	<u>c</u> ongrat <u>a</u> mal <u>a</u> tions	<u>c</u> ongrat <u>a</u> mal <u>a</u> tions	<u>c</u> ongrat <u>a</u> mal <u>a</u> tions
hypoth <u>e</u> r <u>m</u> ia	<u>h</u> ypom <u>a</u> th <u>e</u> r <u>m</u> ia	<u>h</u> ypom <u>a</u> th <u>e</u> r <u>m</u> ia	<u>h</u> ypom <u>a</u> th <u>e</u> r <u>m</u> ia
ob <u>o</u> oe	<u>o</u> bam <u>a</u> bo <u>e</u>	<u>o</u> boem <u>a</u> bo <u>e</u>	<u>o</u> oom <u>a</u> bo <u>e</u>
oct <u>a</u> gon	<u>o</u> ctam <u>a</u> gon	<u>o</u> ctam <u>a</u> gon	<u>o</u> ctam <u>a</u> gon
oct <u>e</u> t			i dunno...
pur <u>p</u> le			
tub <u>a</u>		<u>t</u> ubam <u>a</u> b <u>a</u>	
w <u>o</u> nder	<u>w</u> ondam <u>a</u> d <u>e</u> r	<u>w</u> onderm <u>a</u> d <u>e</u> r	<u>w</u> onnnm <u>a</u> d <u>e</u> r?
w <u>o</u> nderful	<u>w</u> onderm <u>a</u> fu <u>l</u>	<u>w</u> onderm <u>a</u> fu <u>l</u>	<u>w</u> onderm <u>a</u> fu <u>l</u>

Q.5.1 We’ve left out some of their responses. In the table on the answer sheet, fill in the blanks with the appropriate words from the list below.

<u>p</u> urpam <u>a</u> pl <u>e</u>	<u>o</u> ctem <u>a</u> t <u>e</u> t	<u>t</u> ubam <u>a</u> b <u>a</u>	<u>t</u> uuum <u>a</u> b <u>a</u>
<u>p</u> urplem <u>a</u> pl <u>e</u>	<u>o</u> cam <u>a</u> t <u>e</u> t	<u>p</u> urrrm <u>a</u> pl <u>e</u>	

Q.5.2 How would each respondent say the words listed? We’ve given you a few to get started.

Q.5.3 What motivates Alan’s, Barbara’s, and Chris’s eventual answers and uncertainties?

Scoring (max 35)

- **5.1** 1 point for each correct cell. (max 7)
- **5.2** 1 point for each correct cell. (max 18)
- **5.3** 10 points for a really clear and well argued answer. (max 10)

		Alan	Barbara	Chris
Q.5.1	octet	<u>ocamatet</u>	<u>octematet</u>	<i>i dunno...</i>
	purple	<u>purpamaple</u>	<u>purplemaple</u>	<u>purrrmaple</u>
	tuba	<u>tubamaba</u>	<u>tubamaba</u>	<u>tuuumaba</u>

Q.5.2	antiseptic	<u>antimaseptic</u>	<u>antimaseptic</u>	<u>antimaseptic</u>
	Canada	<u>Canamada</u>	<u>Canamada</u>	<u>Canamada</u>
	feudalism	<u>feudamalism</u>	<u>feudamalism</u>	<u>feudamalism</u>
	optics	<u>opamatics</u>	<u>optimatics</u>	<i>i dunno; (oppmatics also permitted)</i>
	party	<u>partamaty</u>	<u>partymaty</u>	<u>paarrmaty</u> or <u>paarty</u>
	table	<u>tabamable</u>	<u>tablemable</u>	<u>taamable</u>
	water	<u>watamater</u>	<u>watermater</u>	<u>waaamater</u>

Q.5.3

Various kinds of answers would be acceptable here; what we're looking for is nontrivial insight into what might be going on rather than an answer according to what a phonologist might answer.

Nonetheless, a top-quality answer should probably bring up the idea that the respondents are trying to achieve contradictory goals, and that different respondents' strategies here are prioritizing different goals. The important parts are these:

- They all make a single word sound like two words by
 - maintaining the original stressed vowel (V')
 - adding word stress to another of the original vowels (V'+):
 - a preceding one that already has secondary stress (Alabama, congratulations, hypothermia), and which therefore is not adjacent to V'.
 - otherwise, the next vowel but one after V' (capital, octagon, wonderuful).
 - adding *ma* just before the second stressed vowel, whether this was originally stressed or newly stressed.
- These rules presuppose at least three syllables in the original word, so they need supplementary rules for bisyllabic words (V1 [C-] C V2):
- They all add stress to V2: V1'....V2'.
- Alan produces *Cama* before C:
 - ama* between C- and C if possible (capamatain),
 - otherwise: *C*ama*, where C* = C (obamaboe).
- Barbara
 - repeats the final syllable before *ma*: *C*V*ma*, where CV = CV2
 - adding this before C (captamatain, octematet, oboemaboe).
- Chris
 - lengthens the first syllable and adds *ma*.
 - So if lengthening isn't possible (e.g. if the vowel is short and the consonant is a stop) he has no strategy.