

Portmanteau

Portmanteau Definition

Portmanteau is a literary device in which two or more words are joined together to coin a new word, which refers to a single concept.

The coinage of portmanteau involves the linking and blending of two or more words, and the new word formed in the process shares the same meanings as the original words. It is different from a compound word, which could have a completely different meaning from the words that it was coined from.

Portmanteau, on the other hand, shares the same [semantic](#) features. For example, the word “brunch” is formed by splicing two words “breakfast” and “lunch.” The spliced parts “br-” and “-unch” are blended to form a portmanteau word, “brunch,” which is the meal taken between breakfast and lunch. Interestingly, the word *portmanteau* is formed by blending two French words, *porter* (“to carry”) and *Manteau* (“cloak”).

Common Portmanteau Examples

In modern times, portmanteau words have entered the English language regularly. We see their widespread coinage in different fields of life. No doubt, they are both useful and interesting. Below is a list of examples of portmanteau words in modern language.

education + entertainment = edutainment
fan + magazine = fanzine
cyberspace + magazine = cyberzine
Oxford + Cambridge = Oxbridge
telephone + marathon = telethon
medical + care = Medicare
parachute + troops = paratroops
motor + hotel = motel
camera + recorder = camcorder

web + log = blog

iPod + broadcasting = podcasting

Examples of Portmanteau in Art and Entertainment

The world of art and entertainment is replete with portmanteau examples, such as:

britcom, from British and [comedy](#) (see also: sitcom)

californication, from California and fornication

cassingle, from cassette and single

cosplay, from costume and play

dramedy, from [drama](#) and comedy

religulous, from religion and ridiculous

sacrilicious, from sacrilege and delicious (Homer Simpson)

scanlation, from scan and translation

sitcom, from situational and comedy

slurve, from slider and curve (baseball pitches)

spife, spoon and knife

spork, spoon and fork

streetball, from street and basketball

Examples of Portmanteau in Literature

Example #1: *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* (Lewis Carroll)

In literature, Lewis Carroll introduces the term portmanteau in his novel “Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There.” In chapter 6, Humpty Dumpty explains the meaning of “slithy” and “mimsy,” in the nonsense poem *Jabberwocky*. He says that “slithy” is a combination of “slimy” and “lithe,” and “mimsy” is a combination of “flimsy,” and “miserable.” He tells Alice:

“You see it’s like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word.”

Example #2: *Finnegans Wake* (By James Joyce)

James Joyce extensively uses portmanteau words in his novel *Finnegans Wake*. For instance:

Ethiquetical is formed from *ethics* and *etiquette*.

Blinkhards is coined from the Dutch “blinken” (“to shine”) and the English to *blink*.

“Stop his *laysense*. Ink him!” *Laysense* comes from the words “layman” and “sense.”

Sinduced is from “sin” and “seduced.”

Comeday is from “someday” and “comedy.”

Fadograph is formed from “fading” and “photograph.”

Example #3: *Bleak House* (By Charles Dickens)

Charles Dickens is famous for giving his characters portmanteau names. Such names correspond with the each [character](#)’s disposition as well. For instance, there is a character named Mr. Tulkinghorn, a stout lawyer, in *Bleakhouse*. *Tulking* is a modification of *bulking* and *horn* suggests an *injurious nature*.

Similarly, Mr. Boythorn in *Bleakhouse* is a compounding of *boyhood*, referring to his goodness of heart; and *thorn*, pointing to his loud and *harsh nature*. Moreover, Mr. *Murdstone* seems to come from the words “murderer” and “stone,” and refers to coldness. In *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the name *Crisparkle* is a blending of the words “Christian,” which manifests his goodness, and “sparkle,” which reflects his boy-like temperament.

Function of Portmanteau

One of the many factors that distinguish the English language from other languages of the world is the scope it offers for creativity, through [literary devices](#) such as portmanteau. The existence of portmanteau words rightly testifies to this creative factor in the English language, where entirely new words with a unique meaning of their own are formed by blending parts of two or more totally different words. Writers are interested in such coinages because they allow them to add creativity to their works, which consequently adds the element of interest in their literary texts. Moreover, it attracts readers’ attention, as they enjoy and appreciate this subtle demonstration of word play.

