Q: The word *honegar* was recently used in an advertisement to mean a mixture of honey and vinegar. It is not listed in my dictionary. Is that a new word?

A: Linguists call that combination of one word created from parts of two other words a blend—that is, if the word lasts. Many such combinations are products of one individual's imagination and soon disappear. Then they are called nonce words—words that are used only for a short time and in a particular context. It appears that *honegar* may be part of that group.

Time magazine recently created the adjective *mingy*, a blend of *mean* and *stingy*. It remains to be seen whether the new word is slated to become a nonce. The same is true of the blend *hiphoptionary*, an awkward blend of *dictionary* and *hip-hop*.

When such combinations do become popular, they become part of our language and are no longer recognized as blends. For example, our word *meld* is a combination of *melt* (to soften) and *weld (*a solid attachment*),* but it is now thought of as a single word, its origin having been forgotten. The noun *flurry* is another even older example. Combining *fluster* and *hurry,* it inherits the sense of confusion and rush that comprises its components. But it is now a longtime dictionary listing that is no longer thought of as a blend.

English has always been a fertile source of blends. The word *hamburger* was first a phrase shortened from *hamburger steak* (named for the German city of Hamburg). The story, perhaps apocryphal, is that the Earl of Hamburg was very fond of beef but preferred food he could hold in his hands. So he placed a slice of beef between two slices of bread, creating a sandwich that immediately became a popular culinary dish—and a popular linguistic tool. One can now order *cheeseburgers, fishburgers, turkeyburgers, low-fat burgers, soyburgers,* and probably additional variations of the original hamburger steak.

The word *hamburger* was a linguistic model for the word *alcoholic* (one addicted to alcohol). As in the blend *hamburger*, the first syllable of the noun *alcoholic* became treated as if it were an affix and other word segments were substituted for that syllable. So now we have *workoholics, chocoholics,* and *shopoholics*; probably other blends are on the horizon.

The Watergate, which became the background for President Nixon's undoing, provided an opportunity for mergers, the final syllable of that hotel's name ("gate") being treated as if it were a suffix. In the *Washington Post*, the blend was *Leakgate*; in *Business Week*, it was *Spygate*; and in speeches by Democratic politicians, it was *intimigate*.

Consider the word *prebuttal*. It denotes a refutation that is prepared in advance of the State of the Union Message and delivered immediately afterward. A *prebuttal* substitutes the prefix *pre-* for the prefix *re-* of rebuttal, a word so well-accepted as part of English vocabulary that almost nobody noticed that *rebuttal* itself was a blend.

Blends are not new. England experienced a huge immigration of French people after the Norman invasion and victory in 1066. One of the many words the French brought with them was *rebuten*, which the French had borrowed from Latin, *re* ("back") plus *boten* ("butt"). The new English verb was a blend—the verb *rebut*. When, centuries later, the new blend *prebuttal* was formed (substituting *pre-* for *re-*), nobody noticed that the new blend was merely a substitute for the former blend. Roger Federer's third-straight win in the men's single finals match at Wimbledon was described as a *three-peat*, deleting the prefix (*re-*) and adding *three*.

During the 2008 political campaign, the blend *frienenemies* was invented to describe erstwhile friends who had become enemies. And just last weekend I found a "nutrition quiz" that included the blend *Frankenfish*. The author explained that this was a blend of *Frankenstein* and *fish*, adding "Get a load of that salmon's size. If we didn't know better, we'd think it was on human growth hormones. …" (Actually, something like that has occurred. Scientists have spliced a growth hormone gene into the DNA of Atlantic salmon. If that doesn't bother you, have some.)

Many blends that we have adopted have become a valuable part of the English language. The useful word *twirl*, for example, is seldom recognized as a blend of *twist* and *whirl*; the blend *flurry*, previously mentioned, which combines *flutter* and *hurry* is well-established. The verb *chortle*, a combination of *chuckle* and *snort*, may be losing popularity, but it is still listed in dictionaries, which define the word as "a joyful chuckle."

And what would we do without those familiar standbys: *brunch* and *motel*? The word *brunch*—the first meal of each day for some people—merges the words *breakfast* and *lunch*. Most Americans enthusiastically welcomed that word, but Emily Post intensely disliked it. She called it "a single-headed, double-bodied deformity."

As for the noun *motel*: some "underforties" cannot explain how that noun (*motor* plus *hotel*) came about. And if traveling with children (before backseat televisions were available) used to affect you the way it did me, you may recall the adjective *frazzled* (a blend of the noun *fray* and the adjective *hassled*). Both parts of *frazzled* evolved from Middle English, *fray*, which meant "threadbare"*;* and *hassled,* which meant "tangled." The verb *hassle,* with its current meaning ("to bother, harass, argue, or fight"), seems to be overtaking *frazzle* in popular usage.

Potpourri

A four-year-old in New York City, on his first trip to visit a relative who lived on a farm, asked, "How many blocks do we have to go?" His father said, "In the country we have miles, not blocks. A mile is much longer than a block, so it will be a while until we get there." The boy thought for a few minutes. Then he asked, "What floor does he live on?" **TFL**

Gertrude Block, lecturer emerita at the University of Florida College of Law, can be reached at block@law.ufl.edu or by snail-mail: Gertrude Block, Lecturer Emerita, Emerson Hall, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.