



Citation:

Lalić-Krstin, G. (2025). The weaponization of lexical blends in Serbian politics: Strategies of discreditation. *Slavia Meridionalis*, 25, Article 3488. <https://doi.org/10.11649/sm.3488>

Gordana Lalić-Krstin

University of Novi Sad

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0897-0178>

The Weaponization of Lexical Blends in Serbian Politics: Strategies of Discreditation

Introduction

This paper examines the use of lexical blends as a means of discrediting opponents in Serbian political discourse. A review of the relevant literature and an analysis of the usage of blends in present-day Serbian reveal that although blending is a relatively recent and unconventional word-formation process in Serbian, it has demonstrated remarkable productivity in the political register. This raises questions about the factors contributing to the proliferation of lexical blends – typically perceived as playful and informal – in political discourse, a domain traditionally characterized by formality, seriousness, and resistance to linguistic innovation. It is argued that their prevalence in political discourse is closely related to certain characteristics that make them particularly effective as linguistic tools in political communication.

The author acknowledges that this article is based upon work and funding from COST Action CA22126 – European Network on Lexical Innovation (ENEOLI), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

Competing interests: no competing interests have been declared.

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s) 2025.

Lexical blending is a word-formation process that combines two (or, less frequently, more than two) source words without adhering to the principle of concatenation, with at least some subtraction in one of the source words (based on Renner, 2023). For instance, *krađanin* combines *krađa* ‘theft’ and *građanin* ‘citizen’ (a citizen caught in the act of stealing, referring to a former government minister who was caught red-handed); *Rio Kinto* is a blend of *Rio Tinto* ‘an international mining corporation’ and *kinta* ‘money (slang)’, coined to highlight the motivation behind the government’s decision to allow lithium mining; or *2palco*, a humorous blend of the name of the famous American rapper and political activist *2Pac* (Tupac Shakur) and the name of the Serbian folk singer *Topalko*, given to the latter after a verbal conflict he had with the current president of Serbia. The blending process frequently disregards morphemes, which are otherwise fundamental units of word formation, instead prioritizing phonological aspects such as syllabic structure, segmental and suprasegmental overlap, homophony, and formal similarity between the blended components.

Like in most other Slavic languages, blends began to appear in Serbian in significant numbers only in the second half of the 20th century (for Polish, see Konieczna, 2012; for Czech, see Bozděchová, 2016; for Slovak, see Böhmerová, 2010; for Russian, see Kornienko, 2016; for Ukrainian, see Borgwaldt et al., 2012; Winters, 2017; for Slovenian, see Sicherl, 2018; for Croatian, see Brdar-Szabó & Brdar, 2008; Marković, 2009, 2011; Mikić Čolić, 2015; for Bulgarian, see Stamenov, 2015; for Macedonian, see Arizankovska, 2016).¹ Despite the relatively short existence of this word-formation process in Serbian, it is estimated to have produced over 3,000 new words, and the number is growing every day (as evidenced by the glossary of nearly 2,200 blends that is available in Bugarski (2019), with an additional 200 entries in Bugarski (2021) and 400 in Tomić (2023)). Some of these remain nonce formations with no lasting impact on the lexicon, while others persist for varying periods and gain broader recognition among speakers. Bugarski (2013, pp. 92–94) observes the increasing presence of blends in traditionally “serious” registers where they

¹ As regards older attested instances, the literature mentions, among others, *lubendinja* [*lubenica* ‘watermelon’ + *dinja* ‘melon’] ‘a hybrid between watermelon and melon’; *Gusketar* [*guska* ‘goose’ + *musketar* ‘musketeer’] ‘a fictional character in a children’s book’ (Bugarski, 2021); *škodilak* [*škoda* ‘skoda’ + *kadilak* ‘cadillac’] ‘affectionate term for a Skoda car; *mafijavelistički* [*mafija* ‘mafia’ + *makijavelistički* ‘Machiavellian’] ‘characterized by methods typical of the mafia and Machiavellian politics’ (Otašević & Sikimić, 1992).

were previously absent. He also notes the growing number of blends coined by well-known public figures, a phenomenon with potential sociolinguistic implications. Whether this “departure from anonymity” will contribute to the institutionalization of individual blends remains to be seen. What is of greater importance, however, is that Serbian morphology has been enriched with a new word-formation mechanism – one that appears to be highly dynamic, creative, and effective.

Politics and word tricks: The art of blended rhetoric

It is widely recognized that political discourse can be interpreted in both a narrow and a broad sense. In its most restricted definition, it refers to the linguistic expression of politicians, i.e., individuals who are elected, appointed, or self-appointed to engage in political activities (van Dijk, 1997, p. 13). This category includes heads of state, prime ministers, and other members of governments, parliaments, and political parties at the local, national, and international levels. However, when defining the scope of political discourse, an interactional perspective can also be taken into account, so that listeners and readers, i.e., recipients of political messages, are also included. Moreover, since political processes involve not only professional politicians but also a diverse array of groups and individuals from activist organizations to ordinary citizens, the boundaries of political discourse can be expanded even further. Ultimately, if one adopts the view that every issue is inherently a political issue, political discourse effectively becomes synonymous with public discourse (for a discussion of the scope of political discourse, see van Dijk, 1997).

Following the approach of Silaški et al. (2009), the scope of this study is extended beyond primary political discourse, i.e., discourse produced and enacted by politicians, to include secondary political discourse as well. This category comprises “readers’ reactions [to primary political discourse], the language of editorials, and political commentary in newspapers, where the direct authors are not politicians themselves but rather political analysts, journalists, or readers” (Silaški et al., 2009, p. 13). For the purposes of this research, any speaker of Serbian is considered a participant in the political discourse, provided that the lexical blend they used denotes or refers to a political concept or entity. This definition also encompasses topics that, while not strictly political

in other socio-cultural contexts, have been heavily politicized in contemporary Serbian political life.

Some examples include the role and reputation of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its representatives:

- *Profitije* [*profit* 'profit' + *Porfirije* 'the name of the current patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church'] – used in reference to Porfirije, alluding to the excessive wealth of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the extravagant lifestyle of its high-ranking representatives;
- *Mafilohije* [*mafija* 'mafia' + *Amfilohije* 'the name of the late bishop Amfilohije'] – used in reference to Amfilohije Radović, alluding to the church's alleged connections with crime;
- *Urinej* [*urin* 'urine' + *Irinej* 'the name of the bishop Irinej Bulović'] – used in reference to bishop Irinej Bulović, inspired by his general unpleasantness and unpopularity.

Negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community:

- *gejmijerka* [*gej* 'gay' + *premijerka* 'prime minister, fem.'] – used in reference to Ana Brnabić, the current prime minister of Serbia, who is gay;
- *Gej SLOVEni* [*gej* 'gay' + *Hej Sloveni* 'Hey, Slavs', the title of the national anthem of former Yugoslavia' + *love* (Eng.)] – in its full form, *Gej SLOVEni, još ste živi?* ('Gay SLOVEs, are you still alive?'); it was suggested as the title of a campaign for LGBTQ+ rights, inspired by a very successful campaign against hate speech in the Balkans, *Hejt Sloveni, još ste živi?* ('Hate, Slavs, are you still alive?'). Both slogans are intentional mondegreens of the first line of the anthem: *još ste živi?* ('are you still alive?') instead of the original *jošte živi* ('[the spirit] is still alive');
- *globalno zaGEJavanje* [*globalno zagre(ja)vanje* 'global warming' + *gej* 'gay'] – an offensive title of an anti-LGBTQ+ book.

Or the absence of neutrality and/or professionalism of media outlets:

- *Uvučićević* [*uvući se* 'suck up to' + *Vučićević* 'the surname of the owner and director of a tabloid newspaper'] – alluding to the director Vučićević's inclination to suck up to politicians;
- *blatoid* [*blato* 'mud' + *tabloid* 'tabloid'] – a derogatory word for a particularly nasty tabloid newspaper;
- *šitfluenser* [*šit* 'shit' + *influenser* 'influencer'] – a disparaging word for an influencer, especially those who failed to support the student protests in 2024.

Lexical blends in Serbian political discourse are most commonly created by journalists, columnists, political analysts, satirists and politicians (Lalić-Krstin, 2014). The issue of authorship may be relevant for several reasons, primarily because it can yield strategic advantages in political competition. As will be demonstrated below, lexical blends can serve as a powerful tool in political battle due to their distinctive characteristics, which explains their frequent presence in political discourse. When politicians themselves create lexical blends, it is assumed that their primary motivation is to exert influence on the political process and advance their own political interests. In the case of analysts, columnists, or satirists as coiners, this motivation may not necessarily be utilitarian in this manner, but it is certainly not apolitical. As Botha (2014, p. 364) notes, political satire differs from political protest or political assent in that it does not necessarily have an agenda and does not necessarily seek to influence the political process. Nevertheless, it can be a significant factor in shaping public opinion.

The bad, the stupid and the weak: Strategies of discredit

The corpus used in this study contains 585 blends, excerpted partly from previous linguistic literature (primarily Bugarski, 2019, 2021 and Lalić-Krstin, 2014), and partly from a non-systematically compiled personal collection of lexical blends collected over the years from printed and electronic sources. As Šarić (2023) observes, blends cannot be extracted from general language corpora because of their formal unpredictability unless, of course, the extraction source is properly tagged. Since Serbian does not have a dictionary or a corpus with such advanced search tools, data collection was necessarily limited to the perusal of existing glossaries and personal compilations.

The understanding of new words is always context-dependent, and this is even more evident in the case of blends in political discourse. Many of them are nonce words, coined for a specific situation and purpose, often inspired by minor events amidst the constant flow of political developments. To interpret them successfully, one needs to be familiar with the intricate dynamics of the political and social landscape, the finely nuanced power relations of the time, and the relevant explicit or implicit intertextual references, allusions and cultural connotations. As can be inferred from the extensive explanations

needed to clarify the meaning of the illustrative examples given above, this is not always easy even *in situ* and can become impossible with the passage of time, even with all the tools of digital archeology that we have at our disposal today. It may be quite challenging to find out exactly which political ultimatum was referred to by the word *ultimatum* twenty or so years ago. Who was it issued by and to whom? Was this ultimatum made in March (*mart*), or was it supposed to expire in March? Will the internet remember what the connection between a popular food delivery service and the Serbian president was, following the tragic event of 1st November 2024, when a concrete canopy at the Novi Sad railway station collapsed, which prompted someone to call him *glovno* [*Glovo* ‘the name of the food delivery service’ + *govno* ‘turd’]. When blends are concerned, the recoverability of meaning is further augmented by difficulties in recovering the form. Due to their generally low transparency, we may not always be able to identify the source words with absolute certainty once we have forgotten the minutiae of daily politics.

Turning now to the blends comprising the corpus for this study, we will first look at the nature of their meaning and use; then, we discuss the types of negatively evaluated features they target, as well as the political entities they usually refer to.

It has been demonstrated that blends in political discourse tend to have negative expressive meanings.² Lalić-Krstin (2014) finds that almost all of over 300 Serbian political discourse blends in her study are negative in meaning. Konieczna (2012, p. 63) states that in Polish “graphic blends have recently been employed by newspapers as a weapon in political fights and by internet forum users as a medium to express their political views”. Šarić (2023) analyzes Croatian blends with personal names, many of which are names of politicians, finding that these blends are frequently used in evaluative contexts ranging from somewhat to extremely negative, and that this is particularly common in discourse samples discussing politics. Similar insights can be gained from discussions of blends in other languages as well (cf. Micheli, 2022, for Italian examples; Maierová, 2022, for English; Wilson, 2008, for examples of blends with the names of Barack Obama in American English).

² By expressive meaning we mean the type of associative or connotative non-propositional lexical meaning which is evaluative in nature and typically conveys the speaker’s subjective attitudes or emotions to the referent (cf. Cruse, 2000, pp. 58–60; Lipka, 2002, pp. 82–84; Prčić, 2016, pp. 85–86).

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the vast majority of the blends analyzed in this study are also derogatory to a higher or lesser degree. This can be seen from all the above examples, to which we add several more for illustrative purposes:

- *šimpantizer* [*šimpanza* ‘chimpanzee’ + *simpatizer* ‘sympathizer’] – sympathizer of the doctor-turned-politician Branislav Nestorović, an anti-vaxxer and conspiracy theorist, alluding to their stupidity;
- *Čederer* [*Čeda* ‘first name of the Serbian politician Čeda Jovanović’ + *Federer* ‘surname of the famous tennis player, Roger Federer’] – used to refer jocularly to Čeda Jovanović after he had beaten a person with a tennis racket;
- *Tupankamon* [*tupan* ‘dimwit’ + *Tutankamon* ‘Tutankhamun’] – used to refer to Aleksandar Šapić, the current mayor of Belgrade, typically perceived as not very intelligent, after his trip to Egypt.

None of the blends we analyzed are appreciative and only a few have a neutral meaning; they are all cases of self-naming of political organizations or initiatives, or they feature in slogans and placards, e.g.:

- *Mostaje* [*most* ‘bridge’ + *ostaje* ‘remain’, 3rd person sg.] – the name of an activist initiative fighting for the preservation of the Old Sava Bridge in Belgrade;
- *rasPETLJAvanje* [*raspetljavanje* ‘disentanglement’ + *petlja* ‘interchange’] – the slogan of a rally held at Mostar interchange in Belgrade;
- *Raskrikavanje* [*raskrinkavanje* ‘unmasking, debunking’ + *KRIK* ‘Crime and Corruption Reporting Network’] – the name of a project by the KRIK network, focusing on identification and exposure of false information in the media.

Once the clear tendency towards derogatory expressive meaning was established, the next step was to investigate the nature of this derogation in order to determine what specific personal characteristics or actions are targeted. We start from Poggi and D’Errico’s (2023) classification of criteria in terms of which a politician’s credibility is evaluated: benevolence, competence and dominance. Benevolence has to do with ethics, and those blends that target benevolence are usually directed at a politician’s sincerity, disinterest or morality:

- *Zlotibor* [*zlo* ‘evil’ + *Zlatibor* ‘first name’] or *Zlončar* [*zlo* ‘evil’ + *Lončar* ‘surname’] – Zlatibor Lončar, the current minister of health, because of his alleged links to organized crime;

- *kradikali* [*krasti* ‘steal’ + *radikali* ‘radicals’, i.e., Serbian Radical Party] – insulting nickname for members of this party;
- *demonokrate* [*demon* ‘demon’ + *demokrate* ‘democrat’, i.e., Democratic Party] – insulting nickname for members of this party.

A politician’s competence is based on their intelligence, knowledge and communication skills, all of which seem to be targeted in the following examples:

- *improvizionar* [*improvizator* ‘improvizer’ + *vizionar* ‘visionary’] – a politician who does not have a long-term vision but does things on a day-to-day basis;
- *Tramputiranje (mozga)* [*Trump* ‘Trump’ + *amputiranje (mozga)* ‘amputation (of the brain)’] – used to describe a situation when a group of right-wing Serbian politicians wore T-shirts to show they support Donald Trump;
- *Diplomislav* [*diploma* ‘diploma’ + *Tomislav* ‘first name’] – Tomislav Nikolić, the then president of Serbia, alluding to controversies regarding the legitimacy of his academic qualifications, which also earned him the nickname *Toma Diploma*.

Finally, the dominance of a politician is founded in his “determination, persistency and ability to influence others” (Poggi & D’Errico, 2023, p. 3), a highly valued feature that is targeted in examples such as these:

- *Prohuljalo s vihorom* [*Prohujalo s vihorom* ‘Gone with the wind’ + *hulja* ‘scoundrel’] – used to denote the imminent end of the rule of Aleksandar Vučić during the mass protests of 2024/25, *hulja* being the word a political analyst famously used to describe him;
- *Gudbajden (Srbijo)* [*gudbaj* ‘goodbye’ + *Bajden* ‘Biden’] – an ironic goodbye to Serbia on the occasion of the visit by the American president Joe Biden;
- *pluskvamfudur* [*pluskvamperfekat* ‘past perfect tense’ + *fudur* ‘future tense’] – verb tense used in the speech of politicians about Serbia joining the EU.

There were a few cases in which it was not possible to determine with absolute certainty which of the three aforementioned categories was being targeted. For example, *razgradonačelnik* [*razgraditi* ‘dismantle’ + *gradonačelnik* ‘mayor’] may be taken to target either the competence of a mayor who is implicitly accused of not knowing how to go about developing a city, or his benevolence since he is corrupt and thus contributes to the decline of the city’s infrastructure. Nevertheless, despite these occasional dilemmas, a clear picture emerges. Of the three categories, benevolence, competence and dominance,

benevolence is the most common target of evaluative blends: around half of the analyzed words that refer to a politician or a political organization do so by smearing them for their insincerity, dishonesty and even criminality. The next in frequency is dominance, presenting a politician as weak, inconsequential or ridiculous, while the least commonly critiqued feature is that of competence. The reason for this may lie in the fact that “morality is considered to be the most important dimension in the negative opinions of voters” (Catellani, 2011, as cited in Poggi & D’Errico, 2023, pp. 116–117), which makes it a likely target for an opponent to attack.

These findings are in line with those of the study of Lalić-Krstin (2014), which was conducted on a smaller and older corpus, where similar results were obtained. However, there is a noticeable trend as regards the targeted political entities. When the blends from the 2014 study are compared with those dated 2014 and later in the present corpus (where the earliest attestation dates could be obtained), among the more recent words there is a surprisingly small number of negative evaluation blends which refer to opposition politicians. The primary targets are the president, the government, and other high-ranking politicians of the ruling party, an observation open to various interpretations that are beyond the scope of this paper but which we believe to be a significant indicator of a shift in the political environment and a change in power relations in Serbia.

Wordplay as warfare: Ridiculing opponents

If we turn now to more concrete means by which blends are made into weapons of politically discrediting opponents, we find that the main mechanisms are the following: humor, wordplay, iconicity, metaphoricity and onomastic distortion.

The greatest power of blends seems to be their ridiculing potential. When we want to discredit someone, we can do so using various types of communicative acts – insult, accusation, criticism, insinuation, etc. – but we can also discredit them by simply laughing at them (D’Errico & Poggi, 2013, p. 423). It has been shown that political humor can create negative perceptions of those that are the subject of ridicule (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Baumgartner et al., 2012; Moy et al., 2005). Laughter can be a way to let the other person feel inferior, thus making them lose their power (Poggi & D’Errico, 2023, p. 183), which can be

extremely damaging for a politician's image, especially if we know that the image of a politician and the branding and management of that image, as some studies show (e.g., O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg, 2007), are some of the key components of a successful political campaign – more important even than the candidate's political agenda (Davies & Newman, 2006; Smith & French, 2009).

The exact way in which lexical blends create a humorous effect and can be perceived as creative and ludic on the one hand, or disparaging and derisive on the other, is complex and multifaceted. First of all, as word-formation processes go, lexical blending is generally considered to produce creative and ludic coinages. The creativity of blending is rooted in the fact that the process is not rule-governed, and the output is thus not predictable (Bauer, 2001; Mattiello, 2013). Unlike with some other additive word-formation processes, where the conjunction of elements produces a phonologically and morphologically predictable result (e.g., *teach* + *-er* > *teacher*), in blending there are no strict rules on what the formal makeup of the output word will be, what the order of constituents will be, or how much of each source word will be used to form the resulting blend (cf. Lalić-Krstin et al., 2025, p. 96). Ludicity, on the other hand, is the ability of a linguistic unit to be recognized as both cleverly contrived and producing a pleasing effect (Lalić-Krstin et al., 2025, p. 98) and can be formalized in terms of markedness at the formal, semantic and/or pragmatic levels (Winter-Froemel, 2018). Formally, lexical blends are marked because they often disregard morpheme boundaries, involve phonological and/or graphological overlap, and may be structurally transgressive by violating language-specific well-formedness rules (Renner, 2015). Semantically, ludic innovations, of which blends are a prime example, frequently feature “negative contents, denigration, depreciative uses, and taboo concepts” (Winter-Froemel, 2018) or juxtapose incongruous notions for stylistic or rhetorical effect. Pragmatically, blends are marked by the additional effort they require: successful encoding and decoding demand heightened linguistic mastery and also a degree of complicity between speaker and listener, as they often function as lexical riddles. Renner (2015) recognizes blends as instances of wordplay *par excellence* and goes on to say that their inherent playfulness can be increased by additional means such as repeated blending, playing with phonemes and/or graphological realizations, morphemic segmentation, sense relations or combinatorial rules.

Looking at Serbian political blends, it is obvious that ludic and frequently jocular and satirical meanings are achieved by the careful selection of source words. They are commonly selected so as to maximize ludicity: to both facilitate

smooth blending of the two forms, but also to create a playful effect. This can be achieved through segmental overlap, e.g., in *Bagrobanka* [*bagra* ‘scum’ + *Agrobanka* ‘the name of a bank’ – used to refer to this bank after a financial scandal], the choice of the first source word is obviously motivated by the desire to maximize phonemic overlap. Occasionally, the phonological motivation is so strong that the semantic aspects of the selection of the source words seem to be largely marginalized. For example, it seems that the sole reason for the choice of *pežo* in *pežoazija* [*pežo* ‘Peugeot’ + *buržoazija* ‘bourgeoisie’ – the rich] is phonological and not semantico-pragmatic because it allows for the overlap of the syllable *žo* and enables a smooth, euphonic and playful transition between the two source words. Graphic play, which is recognized by Renner (2015) as a factor that increases the degree of ludicity, is also very common. Konieczna (2012, p. 60) finds that pejorative meaning strongly correlates with phonetic overlapping, which further supports the argument that linguistic playfulness and humor can be used as vehicles of derogation and/or ridicule.

Secondly, as a process which coins single amalgamated lexical items out of two source words to denote unique concepts, lexical blending is characterized by a high degree of iconicity. In the case of blending, iconicity is manifested as cohesion since meanings that belong together are realized by employing more cohesive mechanisms (Rainer et al., 2014, p. 17). In word-formation, there is hardly a process that is more cohesive than blending. It involves not only a concatenation of (parts of) input units, but also phonological and graphological overlap and frequent blurring of source word boundaries. It practically fuses the segments together, thus increasing the degree of formal cohesion.

This, in turn, makes them particularly suitable for denoting concepts that feature a high degree of semantic cohesion. It has been noted that hybrid plants and animals (e.g., *plumcot*, *liger*, *labradoodle*) or other entities (e.g., *spork*, *Yogalates*, *dramedy*) are commonly named in blends (Lalić-Krstin, 2008a, 2008b; Renner, 2019, 2020, 2023; Tomić, 2023; Vasileanu et al., 2024). Renner (2020, p. 14) notes that blending is a preferred choice in English “in the case of morphosemantic iconicity, when the hybrid or blended output mimics a hybrid concept in the broadest sense, i.e., a concept which is genetically or perceptually part something and part something else”. This conceptual schema of a hybridized entity can be particularly potent in politics when utilized to indicate that a politician or a political organization is inextricably linked or equated with another entity, in particular when that other entity is perceived negatively in that specific socio-political context.

The best examples of the potency of such blends are those in which two personal names are blended to indicate either a common political ground between two politicians, especially when this is seen as undesirable or harmful, as in:

- *Toris* [*Toma/Tomislav* + *Boris*; the first names of two Serbian politicians from different political parties with opposing ideological views] ‘Boris Tadić viewed as someone who shares Tomislav Nikolić’s political agenda’;
- *Tačić* [*Tači* + *Dačić*; surnames of an ethnic Albanian politician from Kosovo (Tači ‘Tachi’) and a high-profile Serbian politician (Dačić)] ‘Ivica Dačić viewed as someone who shares Hashim Tachi’s political agenda’.

Similar to these are blends in which the name of a political actor, whether individual or collective, is combined with a word carrying negative associations:

- *DOSmanlije* [*DOS* + *Osmanlije*; a derogatory word for members of an electoral alliance, Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), in which *DOS* is blended with a word meaning ‘Ottomans’, which carries a strong negative meaning in the Serbian culture];
- *Dvermaht* [*Dveri* + *Vermaht*; the Serbian right-wing nationalist party Dveri (‘Gates’) is equated with or likened to the Wehrmacht, the armed forces of Nazi Germany].

Blending the source words together suggests the existence of uncanny similarities, close links, or indeed a unification of the two entities.³

Another relevant aspect is that of the metaphorical conceptualization of the process of semantic fusion of the two source words. All the blends in the dataset that denote hybrid entities are pejorative, even when the source words themselves are not (e.g., *Toris* or *Tačić* above), which leads us to postulate that it is the process of blending that introduces the derogatory component. It seems that, in the realm of politics, to be mixed and combined with someone else is seen as demeaning to the image of the politician and a sign of weakness. It not only ridicules the politician but also threatens the valued feature of their (ideological) purity, casts doubt on the steadfastness of the outlined political course, and ultimately may tarnish what Geiss (1987, as cited in Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 26) calls ‘the Valiant Leader myth’. These coinages are also frequently accompanied by skillful manipulations of the photographic portraits of the two politicians, by which their two faces become one, with recognizable facial features of both, yet homogenous and indistinguishable at the same time. In this

³ For a more detailed discussion of personal name blends, see Kotowski et al. (2023) and Šarić (2023).

manner the digital affordances of the new media and image processing software are utilized to provide the newly launched neologism with multimodal support, thus facilitating the spread of the word in the digital environment and increasing its visibility, memorability and potential institutionalization.

Finally, another feature of the blends in our corpus that has so far only been hinted at is the fact that a relatively large number of them include a personal name as one or both of its source words. The reason for this lies, of course, in the fact that a negative evaluative blend needs to provide clear clues about who it refers to, which is most easily done by the name of the politician. However, through this word-formation process the name is not only amalgamated with another, usually negative, word or another personal name, but is also subjected to formal modifications that are generally perceived as distortions. As is well known, a person's name is an important part of their self-identity, and this 'name mangling' is usually perceived as offensive by the person in question; moreover, and even more importantly in the world of politics, this distortion of a politician's name is perceived as offensive by voters. Because of this strong connection, to distort a person's name is to attack the person; to make fun of the name is to make fun of the bearer of the name and to demonstrate power over the person because, as vom Bruck and Bodenhorn (2006, p. 27) say, names act as a trajectory of control and "the degree of hurt inflicted is in direct connection to the precise meaning of the name, which is taken to be a reflection of the person". Similar findings are obtained by Poggi and D'Errico (2023, pp. 225–226), who find that the distortion of personal names is a typical discrediting strategy in Italian political parodies. We therefore believe that the reason why so many blends in political discourse are coined by blending personal names is because they can conveniently serve as lexical items which are identifying, discrediting and offensive at the same time.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that blends are frequently used as weaponized lexical items in political discourse and show how morpho-phonological processes can be harnessed for the purposes of political warfare. Even when they are only one-off formations whose precise denotational meaning is elusive, they carry very strong evaluative connotations that most frequently cast doubt on the benevolence of the political opponent, and somewhat less frequently on their dominance or competence. They do so through humor,

wordplay, iconicity, metaphoricity and onomastic distortion, which combine with the semantics of the source words to ridicule and discredit whoever it is they refer to in the political arena.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arizankovska, L. (2016). Macedonian. In P. O. Müller, I. Ohnheiser, S. Olsen, & F. Rainer (Eds.), *Word-formation: An international handbook of the languages of Europe* (Vol. 4, pp. 3070–3086). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110379082-035>
- Bauer, L. (2001). *Morphological productivity*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486210>
- Baumgartner, J., & Morris, J. S. (2006). The Daily Show effect: Candidate evaluations, efficacy, and American youth. *American Politics Research*, 34(3), 341–367. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X05280074>
- Baumgartner, J., Morris, J. S., & Walth, N. L. (2012). The Fey effect: Young adults, political humor, and perceptions of Sarah Palin in the 2008 presidential election campaign. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(1), 95–104. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfr060>
- Böhmerová, A. (2010). *Blending as lexical amalgamation and its onomatological and lexicographical status in English and in Slovak*. ŠEVT.
- Borgwaldt, S. R., Kulish, T., & Bose, A. (2012). Ukrainian blends: Elicitation paradigm and structural analysis. In V. Renner, F. Maniez, & P. J. L. Arnaud (Eds.), *Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending* (pp. 75–92). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110289572.75>
- Botha, E. (2014). A means to an end: Using political satire to go viral. *Public Relations Review*, 40(2), 363–374. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.11.023>
- Bozděchová, I. (2016). Czech. In P. O. Müller, I. Ohnheiser, S. Olsen, & F. Rainer (Eds.), *Word-formation: An international handbook of the languages of Europe* (Vol. 4, pp. 2872–2891). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110379082-025>
- Brdar-Szabó, R., & Brdar, M. (2008). On the marginality of lexical blending. *Jezikoslovlje*, 9(1–2), 171–194.
- Bugarski, R. (2013). *Sarmagedon u Mesopotamaniji: Leksičke skrivalice*. Biblioteka XX vek; Knjižara Krug.
- Bugarski, R. (2019). *Srpske slivenice: Monografija sa rečnikom*. Akademsko knjiga.
- Bugarski, R. (2021, October 23). *Dodatak monografiji o slivenicama*. Peščanik. <https://pescanik.net/dodatak-monografiji-o-slivenicama/>
- Charteris-Black, J. (2011). *Politicians and rhetoric: The persuasive power of metaphor* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230319899>
- Cruse, A. (2000). *Meaning in language: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

- Davies, J., & Newman, B. (2006). *Winning elections with political marketing*. Hawthorn Press.
- D'Errico, F., & Poggi, I. (2013). The parody of politicians: Multimodal distorted imitation aimed at political discredit. *CogInfoCom 2013: 4th IEEE International Conference on Cognitive Infocommunications, 2013*, 423–428. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CogInfoCom.2013.6719284>
- Konieczna, E. (2012). Lexical blending in Polish: A result of the internationalisation of Slavic languages. In V. Renner, F. Maniez, & P. J. L. Arnaud (Eds.), *Cross-disciplinary perspectives on lexical blending* (pp. 51–74). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110289572.51>
- Kornienko, O. (2016). Social and economic background of blending. In L. E. Grinin, I. V. Ilyin, P. Herrmann, & A. V. Korotayev (Eds.), *Globalistics and globalization studies: Global transformations and global future* (pp. 220–225). Uchitel Publishing House.
- Kotowski, S., Arndt-Lappe, S., Filatkina, N., Belošević, M., & Martin, A. (2023). *Co-ordination is not the sum part of its parts in word-formation – the case of personal name blends in German and English*. https://www.anglistik3.hhu.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Fakultaeten/Philosophische_Fakultaet/Anglistik_und_Amerikanistik/Ang3_Linguistics/Dateien/Detailseiten/Kotowski/Kotowski_et_al_blends.pdf
- Lalić-Krstin, G. (2008a). Portmanteau animals and their portmanteau names in English and Serbian. In K. Rasulić & I. Trbojević Milošević (Eds.), *International conference English language and literature studies: Structures across cultures – Proceedings* (Vol. 1, pp. 231–239). Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade.
- Lalić-Krstin, G. (2008b). Word-formation processes in the names of some canine hybrids in English. *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu*, 33(2), 271–281.
- Lalić-Krstin, G. (2014). Upotreba slivenica u srpskom političkom diskursu. In S. Gudurić & M. Stefanović (Eds.), *Jezici i kulture u vremenu i prostoru IV/2* (pp. 355–366). Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.
- Lalić-Krstin, G., Silaški, N., & Renner, V. (2025). Language creativity. In C. Leung & J. Lewkowicz (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to English studies* (2nd ed., pp. 95–106). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003221265-9>
- Lipka, L. (2002). *English lexicology: Lexical structure, word semantics & word-formation* (3rd ed.). Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Maierová, E. (2022). Lexical blends in political discourse. In R. Štefančík (Ed.), *Jazyk a politika: Na pomedzí lingvistiky a politilógie* (Vol. 7, pp. 248–260). Vydavateľstvo EKONÓM.
- Marković, I. (2009). Tri nehrvatske tvorbe: infiksacija, reduplikacija, fuzija. *Rasprave Instituta za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje*, 35(1), 217–241.
- Marković, I. (2011). Hrvatske stopljenice: Novina u slengu, jeziku reklame i novina. In V. Karabalić, M. A. Varga, & L. Pon (Eds.), *Diskurs i dijalog: Teorije, metode i primjene* (pp. 223–238). Hrvatsko društvo za primijenjenu lingvistiku; Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku.
- Mattiello, E. (2013). *Extra-grammatical morphology in English: Abbreviations, blends, reduplicatives, and related phenomena*. De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110295399>
- Micheli, M. S. (2022). An extensive analysis of blending in Contemporary Italian. *Lingua*, 273, Article 103341. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2022.103341>

- Mikić Čolić, A. (2015). Word formation of blends. *Mostariensia*, 19(2), 21–36. <https://doi.org/10.47960/2831-0322.2015.2.19.21>
- Moy, P., Xenos, M. A., & Hess, V. K. (2005). Priming effects of late-night comedy. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18(2), 198–210. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edh092>
- O'Shaughnessy, N. J., & Henneberg, S. C. (2007). The selling of the President 2004: A marketing perspective. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 7(3), 249–268. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.265>
- Otašević, Đ., & Sikimić, B. (1992). Tvorba okazionalizama u srpskohrvatskom jeziku. *Južnoslovenski filolog*, 48, 67–78.
- Poggi, I., & D'Errico, F. (2023). *Social influence, power, and multimodal communication*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003029274>
- Prčić, T. (2016). *Semantika i pragmatika reči* (3rd ed.). Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Novom Sadu.
- Rainer, F., Dressler, W. U., Gardani, F., & Luschützky, H. C. (2014). Morphology and meaning: An overview. In F. Rainer, F. Gardani, H. C. Luschützky, & W. U. Dressler (Eds.), *Morphology and meaning: Selected papers from the 15th International Morphology Meeting, Vienna, February 2012* (pp. 3–46). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.327>
- Renner, V. (2015). Lexical blending as wordplay. In A. Zirker & E. Winter-Froemel (Eds.), *Wordplay and metalinguistic / metadiscursive reflection: Authors, contexts, techniques, and meta-reflection* (pp. 119–134). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110406719-006>
- Renner, V. (2019). French and English lexical blends in contrast. *Languages in Contrast*, 19(1), 27–47. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lic.16020.ren>
- Renner, V. (2020). An ecosystem view of English word-formation. *The Mental Lexicon*, 15(1), 4–20. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ml.00011.ren>
- Renner, V. (2023). Blending. In P. Ackema, S. Bendjaballah, E. Bonet, & A. Fábregas (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to morphology* (pp. 251–270). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119693604.morphcom009>
- Šarić, Lj. (2023). Croatian blends from personal names. In H. Bartels, T. Menzel, & J. P. Zeller (Eds.), *Einheit(en) in der Vielfalt von Slavistik und Osteuropakunde* (pp. 413–430). Peter Lang.
- Sicherl, E. (2018). English influence on word-formational production in Slovene: The case of lexical blending. *AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 43(2), 141–158.
- Silaški, N., Đurović, T., & Radić-Bojanić, B. (2009). *Javni diskurs Srbije: Kognitivističko-kritička studija*. Centar za izdavačku delatnost Ekonomskog fakulteta.
- Smith, G., & French, A. (2009). The political brand: A consumer perspective. *Marketing Theory*, 9(2), 209–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593109103068>
- Stamenov, C. (2015). Borrowing word-formation: -ing suffixation and blending in Bulgarian. *Contrastive Linguistics*, 40(3), 163–197.
- Tomić, G. (2023). *Leksičke slivenice u savremenom engleskom i srpskom jeziku: Strukturni, sadržinski i sociolingvistički aspekti* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Kragujevac.
- van Dijk, T. A. (1997). What is Political Discourse Analysis? *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 11, 11–52. <https://doi.org/10.1075/bjl.11.03.dij>

- Vasileanu, M., Niculescu-Gorpin, A.-G., & Radu-Bejenaru, C.-A. (2024). Keep calm and carry on blending: Experimental insights into Romanian lexical blending. *Word Structure*, 17(1–2), 56–90. <https://doi.org/10.3366/word.2024.0236>
- vom Bruck, G., & Bodenhorn, B. (Eds.). (2006). *The anthropology of names and naming*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, C. (Ed.). (2008). *Obamania! The English language, Barrackafied*. Simon & Schuster.
- Winter-Froemel, E. (2018). Ludicity in lexical innovation (I) – French. In S. Arndt-Lappe, A. Braun, C. Moulin, & E. Winter-Froemel (Eds.), *Expanding the lexicon: Linguistic innovation, morphological productivity, and ludicity* (pp. 229–259). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110501933-231>
- Winters, S. (2017). *Lexical blending in Ukrainian: System or sport?* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Calgary.

Użycie kontaminacji leksykalnych jako broni w serbskiej polityce. Strategie dyskredytacji

W niniejszym badaniu autorka analizuje kontaminacje leksykalne jako narzędzia dyskredytacji politycznej we współczesnym dyskursie serbskim. Chociaż mieszanie wyrazów jest stosunkowo nowym procesem słowotwórczym w języku serbskim, wykazuje ono niezwykłą produktywność w kontekście politycznym, generując ponad 3000 formacji. Analiza korpusu 585 politycznych kontaminacji ujawnia, dłaczego nieformalne, zabawne środki językowe rozprzestrzeniły się w tradycyjnie formalnym dyskursie politycznym. Wyniki badania pokazują, że serbskie neologizmy polityczne mają w przeważającej mierze charakter pejoratywny i funkcjonują jako broń służąca zdyskredytowaniu przeciwników. Konstrukcje te uderzają przede wszystkim w trzy wymiary wiarygodności politycznej: kwestionują życzliwość, kompetencje i dominację, przy czym najczęstszym celem ataków jest życzliwość, co odzwierciedla priorytetowe znaczenie moralności w ocenie polityków przez wyborców. Badanie identyfikuje pięć kluczowych mechanizmów, za pomocą których kontaminacje osiągają efekt dyskredytujący: humor i ośmieszanie, gra słów, ikoniczność wynikająca ze spójności formalnej, metaforyczna fuzja semantyczna oraz zniekształcanie imion i nazwisk. Analiza pokazuje, w jaki sposób procesy morfonologiczne są strategicznie wykorzystywane jako narzędzie walki politycznej – kontaminacje pełnią jednocześnie funkcję identyfikacyjną, dyskredytującą oraz broni językowej o charakterze obraźliwym. Istotnym odkryciem jest niedawna zmiana kierunku ataków: z polityków opozycji na przedstawicieli partii rządzącej, co może wskazywać na szersze przemiany w krajobrazie politycznym Serbii. Badanie to wnosi istotny wkład w zrozumienie, w jaki sposób kreatywność morfologiczna splata się ze strategiami komunikacji politycznej.

Słowa kluczowe: słowotwórstwo; kontaminacja leksykalna; dyskurs polityczny; strategie dyskredytacji; język serbski

The weaponization of lexical blends in Serbian politics: Strategies of discreditation

This study examines lexical blends as tools of political discreditation in contemporary Serbian discourse. Despite being a relatively recent word-formation process in Serbian, blending has demonstrated remarkable productivity in political contexts, generating over 3,000 formations. Analysis of a corpus of 585 political blends investigates why informal, playful linguistic devices have proliferated in traditionally formal political discourse. The findings reveal that Serbian political blends are overwhelmingly derogatory, serving as weaponized lexical items designed to discredit opponents. These formations primarily target three dimensions of political credibility, primarily casting doubt on benevolence, competence, and dominance, with benevolence being the most frequent target, reflecting voters' prioritization of morality in political evaluation. The study identifies five key mechanisms through which blends achieve discrediting effects: humor and ridicule, wordplay, iconicity through formal cohesion, metaphorical semantic fusion, and onomastic distortion of personal names. The analysis demonstrates how morpho-phonological processes are strategically harnessed for political warfare, with blends serving simultaneously as identifying, discrediting, and offensive linguistic weapons. A notable finding is the recent shift toward targeting ruling party politicians rather than opposition figures, suggesting broader changes in Serbia's political landscape. The research contributes to understanding how morphological creativity intersects with political communication strategies.

Keywords: word formation; lexical blending; political discourse; discreditation strategies; Serbian language

Gordana Lalić-Krstin (gordana.lalic.krstin@ff.uns.ac.rs) – adiunkt na Wydziale Filozoficznym Uniwersytetu w Nowym Sadzie (Serbia). Publikowała prace na różne tematy związane ze słowotwórstwem, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kontaminacji leksykalnych w języku angielskim i serbskim. Interesuje się również aspektem ludycznym użycia języka oraz funkcjami kreatywności leksykalnej i gry słownej w różnych rejestrach języka. Zainteresowania badawcze: morfologia leksykalna, leksykografia oraz językoznawstwo kognitywne.

Gordana Lalić-Krstin (gordana.lalic.krstin@ff.uns.ac.rs) – Associate Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia. She has written

on various topics in word-formation, with a special focus on lexical blends in English and Serbian. She is also interested in ludic aspects of language use and functions of lexical creativity and wordplay in different registers. Research interests: lexical morphology, lexicography and cognitive linguistics.